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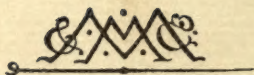
WILLIAM COWPER

CHOSEN AND EDITED  
WITH A MEMOIR AND A FEW NOTES



LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

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*Cowper, William*

# LETTERS

OF

# WILLIAM COWPER

CHOSEN AND EDITED

WITH A MEMOIR AND A FEW NOTES

BY

J. G. FRAZER

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1912

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## PREFACE

IN making this selection from Cowper's correspondence my aim has been to cull such letters as either exhibit the charm and grace of his style at its best, or illustrate his life, character, and opinions on books, men, and affairs. In one sense it is very easy, and in another it is very difficult, to make a good selection of Cowper's letters. It is very easy, because the whole correspondence reaches so high a standard of literary excellence that any considerable number of the letters taken even at haphazard could not fail to contain much of beauty and interest. But it is just the excellence of the letters as a whole that makes it difficult to pick out those which rise a little above the general level. This, however, I have attempted to do; how far I have succeeded must be left to the reader to determine.

All the letters, with a single exception, are printed from the text of Southey's edition. One letter (No. CCXCVII.) is printed, with a necessary correction, from Mr. Benham's selection in *The Golden Treasury Series*. It had previously been published by Grimshawe



in his edition of Cowper's correspondence. The most complete collection of the letters is the one edited by Mr. Thomas Wright of Olney in four volumes (London, 1904). It contains some letters which had not been published before, and it adds to many of the letters passages which had been left out by former editors. But for the most part these new passages are unimportant, and, regarded from the literary point of view, the letters lose little or nothing by their omission.

After my choice was made, I consulted the two volumes of selected letters edited by the Rev. W. Benham in *The Golden Treasury Series*, and by Mr. E. V. Lucas in *The World's Classics* respectively. Both volumes are compiled with excellent taste and judgment, and I have profited by them to glean not a few letters which on a first, and even on a second, perusal of the whole correspondence I had decided to omit. I gladly acknowledge the obligations I owe to those who before me have gathered flowers in this sweet sequestered corner of the wide garden of English literature. The flowers may be old-fashioned, but to some tastes they will be none the worse for that, nor for the air of rural peace and tranquillity which they waft to our bustling generation from the staid, perhaps the humdrum England of the eighteenth century, now receding with all its ideals, its aspirations, and its problems, into the mist and oblivion of the past.

As it is hardly possible to enjoy the letters without

some knowledge of the writer's personal history, I have prefixed to them a memoir in which I have essayed to tell the simple story of his outwardly quiet and uneventful life. It is one of the advantages of dealing with Cowper that his life and writings stand in no need of apology or defence. The moral white-wash which charity, or some other motive, applies in profusion to so many literary blackamoors would be quite out of place on his figure. To describe him is defence or rather eulogium enough, and that is all I have attempted.

Such as the memoir is, any reader who will take the trouble to master the facts it contains will understand most of the allusions in the letters, and can therefore generally dispense with footnotes, which are apt to interrupt his enjoyment by distracting his attention. Nothing indeed could well be more inappropriate than to crush these delicate flowers of literature under a load of ponderous commentary. But here and there I have added a note where it seemed likely to be useful. If the pleasant hours which I have stolen from graver studies to give to the preparation of these volumes should help others, in however small a measure, to know and love Cowper better than before, I shall deem myself doubly rewarded for my labour.

J. G. FRAZER.

CAMBRIDGE,  
*St. George's Day, 1912.*



## MEMOIR OF COWPER

WILLIAM COWPER, one of the best of men and one of the most charming of English poets and letter-writers, was born on the fifteenth of November (old style) 1731, in the rectory of Great Berkhamstead in Hertfordshire. He came of a good stock on both sides. His father, the Rev. John Cowper, D.D., rector of the parish, was a son of Spencer Cowper, one of the judges of the Common Pleas, and brother of the first Earl Cowper, an eminent lawyer and statesman, who was twice Lord Chancellor in the reigns of Anne and George the First. The poet's mother was Anne Donne, daughter of Roger Donne, of Ludham Hall in Norfolk; through her the poet numbered among his ancestors John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's, whose memory, even if the frigid conceits and harsh numbers of his verses were forgotten, would live in the limpid prose of Izaak Walton, the sweetest of English biographers. Through his mother, too, Cowper traced his lineage by four different lines from Henry the Third, King of England. In one of his letters he tells us that at the desire of his kinsman, the Rev. John Johnson (a Donne on the mother's side), he had sent up the long muster-roll of his ancestors, signed and dated, to Mr. Blue-mantle, adding, "Rest undisturbed, say I, their lordly, ducal, and royal dust! Had they left me something handsome, I should have respected

them more." And again in the lines on the receipt of his mother's picture he touches lightly on the same string :

*" My boast is not, that I deduce my birth  
From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth ;  
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—  
The son of parents passed into the skies ! "*

He lost his mother when he was six years old. She died in 1737, at the age of thirty-four, in giving birth to his brother John ; but she made so deep an impression on Cowper's affectionate heart that it never wore out, and when fifty-two years afterwards he received her portrait "with a trepidation of nerves and spirits," he could answer for the fidelity of the likeness. He kissed it and hung it by his bed where he could see it the last thing at night and the first thing at waking in the morning. The sight of it revived his memories of her and of his childhood, and he composed, "not without tears," the verses which enshrine her memory and his own in a casket more precious and more lasting than any of gold and jewels. It recalled the sad day when from his nursery window he watched the hearse bearing her slowly away, and heard the bell tolling to her funeral ; while the maids, in pity for his passionate grief, soothed him with promises, which he long cherished, that she would return. The picture, too, brought back happier recollections of his mother's love and care, her nightly visits to his chamber to see that he was safe and warm, the warm scarlet mantle in which he was wrapped, and the velvet cap he wore, when the gardener Robin drew him, day by day, in his "bauble coach" along the public way to school, and the hours he passed seated at his mother's side playing with the flowers of her dress, the violet, the pink, and the jessamine, while she stroked



his head, spoke softly to him, and smiled. Cowper's father survived the death of his wife for nearly twenty years ; he died in 1756. His son, then resident in London, was sent for to attend him in his last illness, but arrived too late to see him in life. Then for the first time it struck Cowper, whose constant and affectionate nature formed strong local attachments, that the tie with the place of his birth must be broken for ever. There was not a tree, nor a gate, nor a stile in all that country, he tells us, to which he did not feel a relation, and the house itself he preferred to a palace. He sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which he once thought that he should never be parted, and was never so sensible of their beauties as at the moment when he left them to return no more.

After his mother's death Cowper was placed in a school kept by a Dr. Pitman, in Markyate Street, a dull straggling village of Hertfordshire, between St. Albans and Dunstable. There for two years he suffered much from the cruelty of a barbarous young bully, more than twice his age, who singled out the tenderly nurtured little boy to be the butt of systematic but secret persecution. Being at last detected, the ruffian was expelled the school. The treatment to which he was subjected at this school made naturally a deep and lasting impression on Cowper's mind, and no doubt helped to form and colour those strong views of the pernicious influence of English public schools, to which he gave powerful expression in his poem *Tirocinium*.

When Cowper was removed from Dr. Pitman's, he was in some danger of losing his sight, for specks had appeared in his eyes, perhaps as a consequence of the persecution he had suffered, and it was feared that they might extend and cover the retina. He was therefore

placed in the house of an oculist, where he remained two years. The trouble gradually subsided, though to the end of his life his eyes were liable to inflammation. In the last sad days, when, far from the green lanes and shady avenues of his beloved Weston, he paced the Norfolk beach, looking out on the grey North Sea, the salt spray so irritated his eyelids that, after vainly battling with it under an umbrella, he had to abandon his favourite walk by the ocean and content himself with roaming bypaths and under hedges, in duller scenes but softer air.

From the house of the oculist Cowper was removed at the age of ten to Westminster School. There he seems on the whole to have been happy, for in his correspondence he refers to his school-life not infrequently, and always apparently with pleasure. He records, for example, a happy dream he had had of being back at Westminster, in high favour with his master, and rewarded with a silver groat for a composition which was passed round from form to form for the admiration of his schoolfellows. Again, he tells us that he loved the memory of Vincent Bourne, "poor Vinny," as he calls him, the poetical schoolmaster, the neatest of all men in his versification and the most slovenly in his person. He remembered seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to the greasy locks of the absent-minded pedagogue, and then box his ears to put it out again. He thought Bourne a better Latin poet than Tibullus and Propertius, and amused himself by turning some of his verses into English. Of a robust constitution and a good walker to the end of his days, Cowper as a youth excelled in cricket and football. Among his schoolfellows at Westminster were the poets Charles Churchill and Robert Lloyd, the stage-manager and author, George Colman, Warren

Hastings, and his enemy Impey. For Hastings the poet had a high esteem, and the favourable opinion of so good a man and so shrewd a judge of character should plead strongly in favour of the accused statesman at the bar of history. On the great day when Westminster Hall, its grey old walls draped with scarlet, was crammed with the rank and fashion, the beauty, the eloquence, the genius and learning of England, gathered to witness the trial of one who had spread the fear of the English name and the sway of the English race among the dusky races of the East, Cowper thought of his old schoolfellow, the little pale-faced man with the pensive brow and the resolute lines about the mouth, facing that august assembly; and he urged his cousin Lady Hesketh, even at the risk of being squeezed and incommoded for some hours, not to miss the chance of witnessing so memorable and impressive a spectacle. She took his advice, and retired from the hall stunned by the thunder of Burke's invective. The long charges and Hastings's replies to them were read by Henry Cowper, Clerk of the House of Lords, and the report of the silence and attention with which his silvery voice was listened to by the audience for two whole days gave pleasure to his cousin the poet, who refers to the achievement in his correspondence and commemorated it in a sonnet.<sup>1</sup>

At the age of eighteen Cowper left Westminster School, and having fixed on the law as his profession, he was articled for three years to a solicitor, Mr. Chapman of Ely Place, Holborn, and resided with him during that time. One of his fellow-clerks in the office was Edward Thurlow, afterwards Lord Chancellor, who had been educated at Canterbury School. Much of the time which

<sup>1</sup> Beginning—

*"Cowper, whose silver voice, tasked sometimes hard."*

the two young men should have devoted to the study of law in Holborn was more agreeably spent by them not far off in Southampton Row, at the house of Cowper's uncle, Ashley Cowper, afterwards Clerk of the Parliaments, a dapper little man in a white hat with a yellow lining, which made him liable to be mistaken for a mushroom. But it was not for the pleasure of his society that the two clerks repaired with praiseworthy regularity to his abode from the dusty purlieus of the law. He had two charming daughters, Harriet and Theodora, with whom the future poet and future Lord Chancellor passed their days from morning to night "giggling and making giggle." The natural consequences followed. Cowper lost his heart to his cousin Theodora, who returned his love. Thurlow, having no heart to lose, was unmoved by the charms of the lively, handsome, and good-natured Harriet, who afterwards married Sir Thomas Hesketh, and remained the poet's kind, wise, and steady friend to the end of his life. One day, while the two young men were drinking tea with a lady friend and her sister in King Street, Bloomsbury, Cowper said to Thurlow, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall always be nobody, and you will be Lord Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" Thurlow smiled and said, "I surely will!" "These ladies are witnesses," said Cowper. "Let them be," answered Thurlow, "for I certainly will." The prophecy was fulfilled, but the promise was broken. A false lover (for in after life he became a father though never a husband) and a faithless friend, Thurlow appears to have been as unamiable in private life as he was rash, domineering, and headstrong in public affairs. The letters which after a silence of many years he condescended to write to his now famous friend, whom he had neglected and ignored in his poverty and obscurity



are far from confirming the testimony which Dr. Johnson bore to the intellectual capacity of this odious bully.

When he left the solicitor's office in 1752, Cowper, now in his twenty-first year, took chambers in the Middle Temple. It was there that the shadow of religious melancholy, which was afterwards to deepen into hopeless gloom, first fell across his life. He tried to dispel it by poring over the grave, sweet poetry of Herbert ; but a more effectual, if temporary, relief was afforded by a visit which he paid to Southampton with Mr. Hesketh, the betrothed lover of his cousin Harriet. There, to please Mr. Hesketh, who loved yachting, Cowper wore trousers, gave himself nautical airs, and sailed the sea ; but he found the confinement of a sailing-boat, even on a short voyage, exceedingly irksome, and seems to have heartily shared the opinion of Dr. Johnson, that being in a ship is like being in prison with the chance of being drowned. When the moralist of Bolt Court enriched the world with this profound maxim he had never been to sea in his life ; but very soon afterwards he had an opportunity of tasting the delights of "a life on the ocean wave." Crossing over from Skye to Coll in a small sailing vessel, he lay below "in a state of annihilation ;" yet though the wind howled, the rain beat, the sea ran high, the night was very dark, the sailors themselves were alarmed, and all on board were in real danger, Dr. Johnson behaved under these trying circumstances with the perfect composure and courage which he always displayed in the greater emergencies of life. Cowper could boast of no such heroic experience on Southampton Water, yet he deeply sympathised with Noah and Jonah, when they were enlarged from the confinement of the ark and the whale's belly respectively ; and in stepping out of the good sloop *Harriet* he felt that he bore a considerable



resemblance to these celebrated characters. But whenever he could be spared from the horrors of the great deep, he was happier walking with his cousin Harriet in the fields to Freemantle or Netley Abbey, scrambling with her over hedges, or seated on a height in clear still weather, looking across the sunlit sea to the New Forest.

From Southampton, after a stay of some months, he returned to his chambers in the Temple, and was called to the bar on the fourteenth of June 1754. But he had taken no pains to qualify himself for his profession ; and it is more than doubtful whether he ever had a client. He tells us, indeed, that one day, reading by the fireside in his chambers, he was startled by a prodigious lumbering at the door, and on opening it beheld a most rural figure in muddy boots and greatcoat, whom for a few delirious moments he took for a client drawn from afar by the renown of his legal acumen and learning to sit at the feet of the new Gamaliel. Visions of silk, if not of the wool-sack, perhaps floated before the mind of the briefless barrister, but they were rudely dispelled when the stranger drew from his bulging pockets a pair of fat capons and presented them to him, explaining that he was the farmer with whom the poet's brother lodged at Orpington in Kent. The chopfallen barrister, assisted by a few choice spirits, disposed of the capons at supper, but all prospects of legal advancement had vanished for ever.

A deeper disappointment befel him when his uncle, Ashley Cowper, refused his consent to the poet's engagement with his cousin Theodora. The reason which the father alleged for his refusal was that the tie of blood between cousins is too close to admit of marriage ; but perhaps he saw the young man's incapacity for business, or discerned ominous symptoms of the mental derange-

ment which was to follow. Be that as it may, the cousins parted and never met again. That Cowper felt the separation deeply at the time seems certain ; yet in later life he appears to have forgotten his early love entirely, even while he kept up a close friendship and correspondence with her sister Harriet, Lady Hesketh. Theodora was more constant, she loved him to the end of her life, treasured the poems he had written for her, helped him without his knowledge or suspicion in his poverty, and died long after him unmarried.

During his life in the Temple, Cowper belonged to the Nonsense Club, a society of seven Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday, and amused themselves by composing ludicrous verses. Among the members of the club were Bonnell Thornton, George Colman, Robert Lloyd, and Joseph Hill. The last of these was a true friend to Cowper through good and ill ; the poet afterwards corresponded with him and bore honourable testimony to his sterling worth in the rhyming *Epistle to Joseph Hill, Esq.* A man of simple tastes and regular habits, Hill drudged successfully at the law, but could relax himself from his professional cares in the country, reading on sunshiny banks, or lying on his back and watching the clouds go by. Cowper has painted another picture of Hill sitting in his box at the coffee-house on a winter evening, while the waiter with high-raised hand poured from the teapot a long and limpid cascade into the foaming, frothing cup below.

Three years after his father's death, which occurred in 1756, Cowper removed from the Middle to the Inner Temple, where he purchased chambers for two hundred and fifty pounds in an airy situation. About the same time he was made a Commissioner of Bankrupts, but he seems to have cultivated the Muses much more diligently

than the law. He produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to become popular ; and with his brother John, then studying for the church at Cambridge, he kept up a rhyming correspondence ; the whole of it he preserved for a time, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things when he left the Temple. He also helped his brother with a translation of Voltaire's *Henriade*, contributing a version of four books. With a friend named Alston he about this time read Homer through, comparing Pope's translation with the original all the way, and coming to the conclusion that there was hardly anything in the world of which Pope was so destitute as a taste for Homer. Cowper also contributed a few papers to *The Connoisseur*, a magazine of essays in the style of *The Spectator* and *The Rambler*, which was started by his two school-friends, Bonnell Thornton and George Colman, in January 1754 and ran till September 1756. The same friends were two of the original proprietors of *The St. James's Chronicle*, a newspaper characterised by a vein of playful satire, to which Cowper also made a few contributions.

When he had reached his thirty-second year, his little patrimony was well-nigh spent, and there was no appearance that he would ever be able to repair the loss by the practice of his profession. About this time the Clerkship of the Journals of the House of Lords fell vacant and was offered to Cowper by his kinsman, Major Cowper, who had it in his gift. As the business of the office was transacted in private, the poet thought that the post would exactly suit his shy and retiring temperament. But hardly had he acquiesced in the prospect when he began to be assailed by serious doubts and misgivings ; and his uneasiness was greatly increased by some opposition that was made to his proposed appointment, as

well as by the intelligence that he would have to be publicly examined at the bar of the House of Lords in order to give proof of his qualification for the office. This last news fell on him like a thunderbolt. Peace forsook him by day and by night : a nervous fever attacked him ; and though he endeavoured to qualify himself for his duties by reading the Journals of the House of Lords daily for about six months, his distress continued, and every time he set foot in the office he felt like a condemned criminal arriving at the place of execution. This could not last, and when the vacation was pretty far advanced, he went in the month of August 1763 to Margate to rest his aching brain and restore his shattered nerves by fresh air and sea breezes.<sup>1</sup> The visit, like the one on a similar occasion to Southampton, had a beneficial effect. Little as he enjoyed sailing on the sea, he loved the prospect of the ocean, and the solemn monotonous roar of the waves, he tells us, affected him as sweet music affects others, composing his thoughts into a melancholy not unpleasing. But the lullaby of the billows has its dangers. One day walking on the strand, where the cliff is high and perpendicular, Cowper failed for a time to notice that the tide was rising, and when he did observe it, it was almost too late. By running at full speed he was just able to reach one of the cartways cut through the rock, which led him to the top of the cliff and to safety. While the sea pleased him at Margate, the society did not. Every week the sailing hoy (for it was long before the days of steamers) went to London loaded with mackerel and herrings, and returned loaded with

<sup>1</sup> In the previous year (September 1762) Cowper had paid a visit to Brighton and found it "a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping."



company which was more lively than select. By the same hoy Charles Lamb afterwards made the same voyage in the company of the gentleman who professed to have sailed under the legs of the Colossus of Rhodes ; and for all its delays and discomforts the essayist preferred the old sailing vessel, with its weather-beaten, sun-burnt captain, to the trimness and foppery of the modern steam-packet which he lived to see.

From Margate the poet returned to London refreshed, but only to plunge into deeper shades of misery. The terror of the dreaded ordeal increased : he grew sullen and reserved : he fled from society and shut himself up in his chambers : when his cousin, Lady Hesketh, came to see him, he would not speak to her or look at her. To such a pitch did his insane fears carry him, that on the morning of the day when he was to appear at the bar of the House of Lords, he made a determined and nearly successful attempt on his life. When Major Cowper called at his rooms to conduct him to the House, he found his unhappy relative in a condition which once for all put an end to the prospect of his holding the parliamentary office. But the removal of this anxiety did not bring peace to his troubled mind ; the disease was too deep-seated, and soon developed into a black religious melancholy, or rather mania, which obliged his family to put him under restraint. In December 1763 he was removed to a private asylum kept by Dr. Nathaniel Cotton, a skilful doctor and a good man, at St. Albans. Under the care of this kind and judicious physician Cowper recovered his senses in a few months, but it was a year and a half before he ventured to leave the asylum and face the outer world once more. In the interval his religious despair had been changed by a strong revulsion of feeling into religious rapture ; from believing himself



eternally damned he now came to believe himself eternally saved, and was transported with joy and gratitude ; he grudged even the hours of slumber because they interrupted the flow of his happy meditation on the blissful work of the Redeemer. At first the sudden transition excited the fears of Dr. Cotton ; but, himself a devout Christian, he was led by the assurances of his patient to acquiesce in the soundness of his cure, and henceforth, so long as Cowper remained in his house, the two had much happy discourse together on the subjects of their common faith.

When he was sufficiently recovered to leave the asylum, Cowper resolved to avoid London and seek a quiet home for himself elsewhere. He was very poor ; for his patrimony was spent, or nearly so, and he now resigned his Commissionership of Bankrupts which had brought him in £60 a year. But his family subscribed to make him an annual allowance ; among those who contributed was his kind and generous kinsman, Major Cowper. The poet's wish was to settle near his brother John who, after holding a curacy at Orpington in Kent, was now a Fellow of St. Benet's (Corpus Christi) College, Cambridge ; but somewhat strangely his brother could find no suitable lodgings for him nearer than Huntingdon. Cowper left St. Albans on the seventeenth of June 1765, very early in the morning, and reached Cambridge the same day. After a stay of four days there he removed to Huntingdon, where his brother saw him installed in his lodgings and left him.

His mind had now recovered its natural tone of cheerful serenity, and the letters which he wrote from Huntingdon to his friends breathe a spirit of tranquil happiness and contentedness with his surroundings. It was then the height of summer, and he enjoyed bathing in the Ouse, whose broad stream and flowery banks he

praises in a letter written on Midsummer Day shortly after his arrival. He thought the town one of the neatest in England and the country round it fine. "I am persuaded in short," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well." To a passing traveller, it must be acknowledged, the attractions of the scenery about Huntingdon hardly lie on the surface. He sees in it little but flat green meadows and sluggish streams, their banks fringed by willows, with here and there a grey church tower standing out among trees, or the sails of a windmill breaking the low monotonous line of the horizon. But Cowper was happy. After the storm he had found a calm; and among these green pastures and beside these still waters he doubtless often meditated, with a full heart, on the Good Shepherd, who, as he fondly believed, had led his strayed sheep into a quiet fold.

The distance from Cambridge made Cowper a horseman, for he met his brother John alternately at Cambridge and Huntingdon; and though he sometimes got a lift in a neighbour's chaise he generally rode over, a distance of some fifteen miles across a flat country, to the University town. Amongst the friends to whom he wrote from Huntingdon were the ever faithful Joseph Hill, who had kindly taken charge of Cowper's affairs during his illness, Lady Hesketh, and Major and Mrs. Cowper. Of these Mrs. Cowper was his first cousin. Her brother was Martin Madan, at that time chaplain to the Lock Hospital, a clergyman of the Church of England whose style of preaching approached to that of the Methodists, then rising into importance. He had visited Cowper during his mental affliction in the Temple, and had attempted to soothe his

cousin's distress by religious consolation. Afterwards he incurred Cowper's deep disgust by publishing a treatise called *Thelyphthora* in defence of polygamy. To that work the poet makes many references in his letters. It drew down on its author a storm of opprobrium, which drove him from his chaplaincy into retirement.

The longer Cowper stayed at Huntingdon the more he liked the place and the people. "In about two months after my arrival," he says, "I became known to all the visitable people here, and do veritably think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw." Amongst the acquaintances whom he made at Huntingdon was the family of the Unwins, destined to influence the whole subsequent course of his life. It consisted of a father and mother, a son and a daughter. The father, the Rev. Morley Unwin, a man now advanced in years, had been master of the free school and lecturer to the two churches at Huntingdon before he obtained a college living at Grimstone in Norfolk. His wife, whose memory is imperishably linked with that of Cowper, was Mary Cawthorne, the daughter of a draper at Ely. She was much younger than her husband. Her understanding was good, her temperament calm and cheerful, her piety deep and fervent, her countenance grave, but sweet and serene. She was well read in the English poets and had excellent literary taste ; she loved rural walks ; and her manners, according to Cowper, a very good judge, were more polite than those of a duchess. Not liking the society and the sequestered situation of Grimstone, she persuaded her husband to return to Huntingdon, where he was known and respected. Accordingly he took a large convenient house in the High Street of the town,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The house, a plain edifice built of bricks which once were red but have turned a dusky colour, has now been divided into

and received into it a few pupils, whom he prepared for the University. His only children were a son and daughter. The son, William Cawthorne Unwin, an amiable young man of about twenty-one, had lately returned home after graduating at Cambridge. The daughter, Susanna, was a girl of about eighteen, "rather handsome and genteel," as Cowper describes her; she appears to have resembled her mother in character as well as in piety. Altogether Cowper found the Unwins "the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive."

The friendship which he struck up with them, based on congenial tastes and similar dispositions, was so close that when a vacancy occurred in Mr. Unwin's house through the departure of a pupil, Cowper applied to succeed him, and on the eleventh of November 1765 he became an inmate of the house. In his letters he describes the calm, happy, regular life which he led as one of the family—the morning prayers and service in church, the early dinner, the religious talk in the garden, the walk after tea, the evening reading and conversation till supper, the hymns sung to Mrs. Unwin's accompaniment on the harpsichord, and last of all, the evening prayers. In this peaceful round his life glided quietly away for more than eighteen months. Even wintry weather, which dispelled some of the summer charms of Huntingdon, could not spoil his domestic happiness. "I am glad," he writes to Lady Hesketh in January 1767, "you spent your summer in a place so agreeable to you. As to me, my lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant

two. The parlour, in which Cowper is believed to have sat with the family, is a handsome apartment on the ground-floor with three deep windows looking out on the street. The church of St. Mary, where he is said to have worshipped, is only a few steps off across the street.



prospects : all flat and insipid ; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present : our bridges shaken almost to pieces ; our poor willows torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat. Yet even here we are happy ; at least I am so ; and if I have no groves with benches conveniently disposed, nor commons overgrown with thyme to regale me, neither do I want them. You thought to make my mouth water at the charms of Taplow, but you see you are disappointed." In a memoir of his life and sufferings which Cowper drew up at Huntingdon for the benefit of his new friends, and which was published after his death, he concludes his sad story by expressing his contentment with his "place of rest," and his hope that nothing but death might interrupt the even tenor of the life he enjoyed there.

But a tragic interruption was at hand. In July 1767 Mr. Morley Unwin, riding on a Sunday morning to his church at Graveley, was thrown from his horse and died, after lingering in pain for several days in the cottage to which he had been carried. This broke the tie which bound Mrs. Unwin to Huntingdon; she decided to leave the place, and Cowper resolved to go with her. The son, William Cawthorne Unwin, had meantime taken orders and been ordained to a curacy. A visit which they received at Huntingdon from the Rev. John Newton a few days after Mr. Morley Unwin's death determined Mrs. Unwin and Cowper to remove to Olney, where Mr. Newton was curate. He undertook to find a house for them, and they accepted his offer. Accordingly, he engaged Orchard Side, a tall, plain, red-brick house standing in the market-place of Olney, and so near the vicarage that by opening doorways in the garden walls the occupants of the two houses could com-



municate without going into the street. Newton lived in the vicarage, for Moses Browne, the vicar, burdened with a large family, was an absentee through debt. Thither accordingly Mrs. Unwin and Cowper removed, and were settled in their new home before the end of the year.

The town of Olney is the most northerly in Buckinghamshire. It stands on the northern side of the Ouse, and consisted in Cowper's time of little more than a single long street, broadening about the middle into a triangular market-place adorned with three fine elms. Most of the houses were built of yellow stone with thatched roofs. The outstanding features of the place were the handsome old church with its tall spire rising on the outskirts of the town, and the long bridge with arches of various shapes and sizes bestriding the river in front.<sup>1</sup> At Olney the Ouse is a sluggish stream winding in serpentine curves between banks fringed by bulrushes. On either side the meadows are flat and green, and beyond them the ground rises into heights which here advance towards the river in flat promontories, and there recede from it in shallow bays. Standing on the bridge and looking westward up the stream, you see on higher ground, at a distance of less than two miles, tall forest trees rising up against the sky-line, and seeming to overhang a square church tower. They mark the site of Weston Underwood. The road to it, so often trodden by the feet of William Cowper and Mary Unwin, runs parallel to the river, hardly more than half a field's breadth up the slope; from the point where the road rises with the swell of the ground, there is a pleasant prospect over the broad green valley of the Ouse, a prospect loved by

<sup>1</sup> The old bridge, having fallen into disrepair, was pulled down in 1832 and replaced by a much shorter one.

the poet and celebrated by him in the first book of *The Task*.<sup>1</sup>

In itself the town of Olney was mean, if not squalid, and a great proportion of the inhabitants miserably poor. Lace-making, an unwholesome sedentary occupation, was the principal industry, and with straw-plaiting it employed so many women and children that the farmers of the neighbourhood found it difficult to obtain hands for their work. In his house on the market-place, adjoining the lane called Silver End, the least reputable quarter of the town, the poet had to put up with the incessant screaming of children and barking of dogs ; and on the Fifth of November, when the urchins were particularly obstreperous, and engaged in a sport which they called hockey, but which consisted essentially in bespattering each other and the windows of the houses with mud, the poet was forced from time to time to arise in his wrath and threaten them with a horse-whip. Putrid exhalations, fishy fumes of marsh miasma, and miry roads in winter are among the unattractive features of Olney which Cowper has left on record. When William Unwin first visited his mother at Olney and contemplated the front of the house, he was shocked ; in his eyes it had the appearance of a prison.

Mrs. Unwin and Cowper had been drawn from Huntingdon to Olney by the attractions of the Rev. John Newton, whose clerical ministrations they expected to enjoy. They certainly received them in full measure, but whether they enjoyed them or benefited by them is

<sup>1</sup> Olney and its neighbourhood are described with loving fidelity by Hugh Miller, in his *First Impressions of England and its People*, Chapter xv. He made a pilgrimage to Olney and Weston in the autumn of 1845, and was so fortunate as to be guided over the poet's haunts by a hale old woman who well remembered Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.

at least open to question. Newton, a man of robust constitution and iron nerve, had begun life as the captain of a Liverpool slaver, a profession which he afterwards exchanged for that of a clergyman of the Church of England. That his piety was deep and sincere, and that he had a disinterested affection for Cowper, cannot be doubted ; but it seems equally certain that he was very indiscreet, and that the religious stimulants with which he plied Cowper's sensitive and highly-strung nature had a most pernicious influence, and were indeed a main cause of the terrible relapse into insanity which the poet suffered a few years after settling at Olney. Nor was Cowper the only victim of the Rev. John Newton's injudicious zeal. The reverend gentleman has left it on record that his name was "up about the country for preaching people mad" ; he knew near a dozen of his flock, most of them pious or, as he phrases it, gracious people, who were disordered in their minds, and he wondered whether the cause was the sedentary lives the women led over their lace-pillows, or the crowded little rooms in which they lived. The principal cause, if we may judge by Cowper's case, was Newton himself. He had engaged an uninhabited house called "the Great House" in Olney, and here he held prayer-meetings characterised by religious heat and excitement. At these the shy poet, who had already sacrificed his career in life and been driven into an asylum at the mere prospect of speaking in public, had often to lead the devotions of the godly, engaging aloud in extemporaneous prayer, the cynosure of all eyes and ears in the assembly. That he did so with impressive effect we are told and can well believe ; but we know from his own testimony that such public exhibitions cost him hours of great agitation before he took part in them, and we can easily imagine the rapid pulse, the flushed

cheek, and the throbbing head with which he issued from the meetings, after exposing his heart's deepest emotions to the scrutiny of the censorious, too often, it may be feared, to the mere idle curiosity of the vulgar. Even his walks on summer evenings were sacrificed to these religious exercises; and instead of enjoying the fresh air and sunshine in the open fields he was shut up in the house listening to long-winded prayers and sermons till supper-time.

The baneful effect of all this on Cowper soon manifested itself. After the settlement at Olney his letters to his friends first became rare and then ceased altogether. The correspondence with Lady Hesketh came to an end, and was not resumed for many years; that with Joseph Hill grew perfunctory and was chiefly confined to matters of business, which that unwearied friend continued to transact for the recluse. The distance from Cambridge also cut him off from easy intercourse with his brother; instead of meeting once a week they met now only once a year. In July 1769 he lost the companionship of his friend William Unwin, who left Olney to reside at Stock, near Ramsden, in Essex, of which he had been appointed rector. Another blow fell on the poet in March 1770, when his brother died of asthma at Cambridge. Cowper was with him in his last days, and wrote an account of his illness and death, which is included in his works. Thus more and more isolated and left to the tender mercies of the Rev. John Newton, Cowper gradually sank into a profound melancholy, which the composition of the *Olney Hymns*, undertaken at Newton's suggestion by the two friends jointly in 1771, was hardly of a sufficiently recreative and exhilarating character to dispel.

By January 1773 the melancholy had deepened into



ventured to denounce from the pulpit the popular celebration of Guy Fawkes's Day, and in particular to discourage the lighting of bonfires and the illumination of houses with candles on that festive evening. This was too much. So long as he confined himself strictly to hellfire and brimstone, he might be tolerated, but when he touched the sacred ark of bonfires and tallow candles on the Fifth of November, the populace rose like one man. There was a general explosion. On Guy Fawkes's night people put candles in their windows who had never done so before ; and those who had done so before, now put twice as many. Night was turned into day by the blaze of the illumination. A mob paraded the street, smashing windows and extorting money from one end of the town to the other. The vicarage was threatened. The curate committed the case to the Lord, but the Lord paid no attention. Providence did not interpose. The crowd drew near. Mrs. Newton was terrified. A flag of truce was sent out, a parley was held. Soft words had some effect, a shilling had much more ; the mob dispersed, and they slept in peace at the vicarage.

So in time Mr. Newton, in the character of righteous Lot, turned his back on Olney and retired to London, where he had been presented by his friend Mr. Thornton to the rectory of St. Mary Woolnoth. But the parallel was not completed by the destruction of the wicked town. Olney survived his departure ; the effervescence stirred up by his fiery ministry subsided, and the percentage of lunacy in the parish visibly declined. Peace of mind once more reigned at Orchard Side, and Cowper entered on what was perhaps the happiest period of his life. Not that he was then or ever afterwards perfectly happy ; the shadow of religious melancholy was never wholly absent from his mind ; it always crossed and



chequered the natural sunshine of his disposition and the outwardly calm flow of his peaceful days; but by constant occupation of mind and body he was able to some extent to keep it under control. Of this chequered existence his letters henceforth present a full, almost a daily record, down to the time when he left his home in Weston to drag out the miserable remainder of his days in Norfolk. The principal events of these quiet years were the writing and the publication of his books, the revival of old friendships, and the acquisition of new. Of these outstanding incidents in the poet's otherwise uneventful career a brief notice may not be out of place.

In the curacy of Olney Mr. Newton was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Scott, author of an elephantine commentary on the Bible in one hundred and seventy-four parts, which achieved the distinction of breaking the unfortunate publisher and reducing the commentator himself to indigence. However, he was amply rewarded for his labours by the honour of very nearly saving John Henry Newman's immortal soul,<sup>1</sup> and by the diploma of D.D. forwarded to him from the "Dickensonian College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania," by persons whose names appear not to be blazoned on the beadroll of fame. His style of preaching was acrid: he had a low opinion of his parishioners, and was at no pains to conceal his opinion: he detected several "professors" who had more leaves than fruit; and as he preached only twice a day on Sundays, he failed to satisfy the immoderate appetite for sermons which the population of Olney had contracted

<sup>1</sup> "The writer who made a deeper impression on my mind than any other, and to whom (humanly speaking) I almost owe my soul,—Thomas Scott of Aston Sandford."—J. H. NEWMAN, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London, 1888), p. 5.

under his predecessor, so that there was a melancholy falling away to Dissent.

If Mr. Newton did much to unhinge his friend's mind, he at least made an attempt, after his departure from Olney, to repair the mischief. With this humane intention he invited Cowper to consider the parallel case of the Rev. Simon Browne, a respectable dissenting clergyman, who having suffered a domestic bereavement or knocked a highwayman on the head (for accounts differ as to the source of his mental affliction) sank into a deep dejection, ending in a settled persuasion that "he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish, and left him only an animal life, in common with brutes; so that, though he retained the faculty of speaking in a manner that appeared rational to others, he had all the while no more notion of what he said than a parrot,—being utterly divested of consciousness." In this melancholy situation Browne proposed to apply for the restitution of his lost soul, singularly enough, to Queen Caroline; but the application being nipped in the bud by his friends, he devoted his shattered energies to the composition of a dictionary, a work for which, as he observed with some appearance of justice, the possession of a rational soul is wholly unnecessary. Later in life, sinking still lower in the scale of being, he turned his attention to polemical divinity, a subject to which his caustic remarks on dictionaries might perhaps be applied with equal force and even greater justice. But the spectacle of a once rational mind reduced to such deplorable extremities brought no comfort to poor Cowper. He admitted, perhaps he even smiled, at the delusion of the lexicographer and divine, but he refused to apply the lesson to his own case.

Mr. Newton rendered Cowper a much better service

when, on leaving Olney, he introduced him to the Rev. William Bull, an Independent minister residing at Newport Pagnell, five miles distant from Olney. A man of sober mind yet fine imagination, aimable disposition, literary tastes, and cultivated understanding, Mr. Bull was an entertaining companion in society, though at other times his vivacity was dashed with a vein of tender and delicate melancholy. Motives of compassion at first led him to visit Cowper once a fortnight ; but the two soon became good friends ; the poet occasionally returned his visits, and corresponded with him. Cowper now betook himself to gardening. In the plain little garden at the back of the house he built a couple of frames for growing pines, and glazed them himself with glass procured from Bedford. He also amused himself with carpentry, manufacturing tables in profusion, and joint-stools such as never were before or since. He also made squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, and bird-cages, as well as any squire in the country ; and in the article of cabbage-nets he had no superior. He even took to drawing, and cultivated that fine art for a whole year, producing as the fruit of much labour a series of figures which had, he assures us, the merit of being unparalleled by any productions either of art or nature. In Mrs. Unwin's eyes they were beautiful, and she had three of his landscapes framed and glazed. After recounting his artistic exploits in one of his letters, he bursts out, "O ! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect ! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow."

Happily for the world he sought for recreation and found his true vocation in literature. Mrs. Unwin urged him to write a long poem, and suggested as a subject "The Progress of Error." He assented, and engaged in the labour of poetry with such ardour that between

December 1780 and March 1781 he had completed four long poems, *The Progress of Error*, *Truth*, *Table Talk*, and *Expostulation*. The task of finding a publisher was undertaken by Mr. Newton, who induced Mr. Joseph Johnson, of St. Paul's Churchyard, to accept the book. Johnson had already published several volumes for Newton, who esteemed him, though not a professing Christian, a man of honour and integrity; indeed he admitted with regret that "professors," by which in the cant of his sect he meant persons who make open profession of religion, "in general find they may more safely depend upon the people of the world, than upon one another." A sad testimony for a "professor" to bear to "professors!" Henceforth all Cowper's works were published by Johnson, and though the poet often repined at the slowness of the printing press he seems to have had no other ground for complaint against his publisher; indeed after many years of business relations with him the poet expressed his belief, and apparently his astonishment, that "though a bookseller, he has in him the soul of a gentleman." To the credit of his discernment, Johnson manifested more than common interest in Cowper's poems; he read them critically in the proof-sheets and marked several defective passages, which the candid author corrected with grateful acknowledgments to his censor and publisher. The book went slowly through the press; the printing dragged out through the whole of the summer and autumn of 1781, and the volume was not published till March 1782. But the delay was attended by a great advantage; the author was not only able to polish the original poems in accordance with his opinion that to touch and retouch is the secret of almost all good writing; with the encouragement of his publisher he added several fresh poems,



including *Conversation* and *Retirement*. At Cowper's request Newton wrote a preface for the volume, but its serious tone frightened the publisher, who thought that, while it might attract the pious, it would disgust the profane ; and as he apparently rested his hopes of the sale of the work rather on the profane than on the pious part of the public, he earnestly recommended that the obnoxious preface should be withdrawn. Cowper regretfully and Newton honourably acquiesced. It was not till the volume had run through four editions and could stand on its own merits that Johnson ventured to prefix to it Newton's well-meant tribute to his friend's poetry.

The summer of 1781, when Cowper was busy with his poetical labours and the correction of the press, was very hot ; the fields languished and the upland grass was burnt. In order to procure some coolness and shade in the garden, where the heat reflected from the walls and the gravel seemed like that of Africa, Cowper converted a small greenhouse into a summer parlour. The walls were hung with mats, the floor covered with a carpet, and the sun for the most part excluded by an awning ; and in this pleasant nook, with myrtles looking in at the window, and a prospect of rows of pinks and beans, of carnations and roses blooming in the sunshine outside, the poet and his friends passed the heat of the day in happy converse or contented silence, while the rustling of the wind in the trees, the singing of birds, and the hum of bees in a bed of mignonette made music in their ears.

For by this time the domestic circle at Orchard Side was enlarged by an important addition. One day, looking out of the parlour window on the market-place, Cowper saw two ladies calling at a shop opposite. One of them he knew ; she was Mrs. Jones, wife of a

clergyman who resided at the village of Clifton within a mile of Olney. But who was the other? Cowper's curiosity was aroused ; he made enquiries, and it turned out that she was Lady Austen, sister of Mrs. Jones and widow of Sir Robert Austen, a baronet. Struck by her appearance, the poet persuaded Mrs. Unwin to ask the two ladies to tea, though when they came, his shyness getting the better of him, he could hardly be prevailed on to face the stranger. However, having forced himself to engage in conversation with Lady Austen, a lively agreeable woman of the world, he was so stirred and attracted by her that he escorted the two ladies back to Clifton, and cultivated his new acquaintance with such assiduity that he soon came to call her by the familiar title of "Sister Ann." On her side, Lady Austen found the society at Orchard Side no less to her mind ; and the two families were quickly on the most intimate terms. One fine July day they picnicked together in the Spinney, a delightful bower in Weston Park. The eatables and drinkables were conveyed to the spot in a wheelbarrow ; the servants boiled the kettle under a great elm ; the wheelbarrow served as a tea-table ; and after a walk in the neighbouring Wilderness the friends returned home, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other.

So pleased indeed was Lady Austen with Olney and its society, that she thought of settling in it as soon as she could dispose of her house in London. Cowper welcomed the prospect for Mrs. Unwin's sake as well as his own ; for since the departure of the Newtons she had had no female friends in the place, nor even a woman with whom she could converse in any emergency. With her high spirits, lively fancy, and ready flow of con-

versation Lady Austen promised to introduce a sprightliness into the calm home, which, if it was peaceful before, might be none the worse for being a little enlivened. For a time the promise was fulfilled, the fair prospect was unclouded ; and when Lady Austen returned to London in October the two friends at Orchard Side missed her. Cowper and she corresponded ; but when she expressed too romantic an idea of the merits of her new friends, and too high-flown expectations of happiness from her intercourse with them, Cowper was constrained to check these effusions in a letter which gave deep offence, and for a while all correspondence between them ceased.

However, in time the lady relented and sent a peace-offering of ruffles, which was accepted. The breach was healed, and in the following summer (1782) Lady Austen returned to the house of her sister, situated on the brow of a hill, the foot of which is washed by the river Ouse as it flows between Clifton and Olney. But in the absence of Mr. Jones, the house was besieged by burglars every night, and the ladies, worn out with watching and repeated alarms, were at last prevailed on to take refuge with Mrs. Unwin at Olney. When Mr. Jones returned and men with firearms had put the ruffians to flight, Mrs. Jones went back to the house, but Lady Austen remained in Olney, and lodgings were taken for her at the vicarage. Only an orchard divided the garden of the vicarage from the garden of Cowper's house ; and to facilitate communication doors were opened in the two garden walls, so that the inmates of the houses could meet when they pleased without going through the dirty streets of the town. They now saw each other daily and for many hours a day. They met every morning, dined with each other

alternately except on Sundays, and did not separate till ten or eleven at night. In the morning Cowper walked with the ladies, in the afternoon he wound thread for them, in the evening he played at battledore and shuttlecock with one of them, while the other played on the harpsichord, and a little dog, lying under the performer's chair, howled an accompaniment.

On the whole, this social intercourse, while it imposed a heavy tax on Cowper's time, was highly beneficial to his health and spirits. The gay, vivacious Lady Austen dispelled for a time the clouds of melancholy which too often hung over him ; she was the Muse who inspired the most sportive and some of the most serious of his poems. He composed songs for her to sing to the harpsichord ; amongst others the *Dirge for the Royal George* was written to suit one of her favourite airs. Another day, seeing him sunk in dejection, she told him the story of John Gilpin. Next morning he said that he had lain awake most of the night laughing at the story, and that he had turned it into a ballad. The ballad was eagerly copied, and finding its way into the newspapers was publicly recited by the comedian Henderson with great success. It became very popular before Cowper publicly acknowledged it by printing it along with *The Task* in the second volume of his poetry. The theme of the *The Task* itself, the greatest of his poems, and one of the most delightful works in the English language, was suggested by Lady Austen. She had often urged him to try his hand at blank verse, and he promised to comply if she would find him a subject. "Oh," she answered, "you can never be in want of a subject ; you can write upon any ; write upon this sofa !" The poet took the hint and set to work on *The Task* early in the summer of 1783. Writing sometimes an hour a day, sometimes half an



hour, and sometimes two hours, often in great depression of spirits, he completed the poem in the autumn of the following year, but it was not published till June 1785. In the interval the friendship with Lady Austen was severed for ever, and in the summer of 1784 she had left Olney not to return. The cause of the breach has not been fully ascertained ; but on the whole it seems probable that she was in love with Cowper and wished to marry him ; that Mrs. Unwin was jealous, and that Cowper, too deeply attached to his Mary to dream of wounding her loving and faithful heart, renounced for her sake all relations with his brilliant and fascinating friend. He bade her farewell in a letter which, in a burst of mortification and pique, she destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

But if Cowper lost a friend in Lady Austen, he about the same time gained new friends in the Throckmortons of the Hall at Weston Underwood. Their house, which has long since been razed to the ground, stood in an old-fashioned park, which skirts the high road from Olney at the point where it enters the village. The head of the Throckmorton family was then Sir Robert Throckmorton, a very old gentleman, who resided at his seat of Bucklands in Berkshire. On the death of an elder brother in 1782 Mr. (afterwards Sir) John Throckmorton came into possession of Weston Park. With his predecessor at the Park Cowper had had no relations, though he had been favoured with a key to the pleasure-grounds, and thus had been able to enjoy those rural walks and scenes which he has immortalised in the first book of *The Task*,—the umbrageous avenue of chestnuts—the rustic bridge where the willows dipped their pendant boughs in the

<sup>1</sup> Lady Austen, who had resided much in France, afterwards married an accomplished Frenchman, M. de Tardiff, and died at Paris, in 1802, two years after Cowper.

stream—the proud alcove crowning the summit, with its far prospect over the nearer woodlands to the winding Ouse—the lime-tree walk with its high verdurous arch like a cathedral aisle, and the ground dappled with dancing lights and shadows as the wind stirred the light leaves overhead—the Wilderness with its well-rolled paths of easy sweep—and last the elm-grove, from between whose stately trunks on autumn days the thresher might be discerned sweating at his task, while the chaff flew wide and the straw sent up a mist of motes that sparkled in the noonday sunshine.

When Mr. John Throckmorton came to reside in Weston, Cowper sent him a complimentary card, and requested a continuance of the privilege which he had enjoyed by the favour of Mr. Throckmorton's mother, who had gone to end her days at Bath. The request was readily granted, but for about two years there was no intercourse between the families at Olney and Weston. The Throckmortons were Catholics, and having on that account received many gross affronts after they settled at Weston, they were naturally shy of making new acquaintances. However, in May 1784, when balloons had just come into fashion, Mr. Throckmorton determined to send up one from his park, and among the neighbours whom he invited to witness the ascent were Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. They went and were received by the Throckmortons with particular civility. A warm regard on both sides was the result of the happy meeting. Cowper found Mr. Throckmorton most agreeable and engaging, and in Mrs. Throckmorton, "young, genteel, and handsome," he saw a "consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness." They on their side appear to have been no less pleased with their visitors. A few days later, when

Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were sheltering from a shower under a large elm in a grove fronting Weston Hall, Mrs. Throckmorton ran out to them in the rain, and insisted on their coming into the house till the weather cleared. Again, a few days passed, and Cowper and Mrs. Unwin on a walk through the park had almost reached the gate, when the iron gate of the courtyard rang, and they saw Mr. Throckmorton hastily advancing to them. He came to offer them the key of the garden, the only part of his grounds where he and his wife enjoyed perfect privacy. It was not long afterwards before the friends stood on a footing of cordial intimacy. Cowper was given full access to the library, a valuable privilege to one so fond of books, and so poorly provided with them ; for though he had owned a good collection of books when he resided in the Temple, he lost it on his removal to St. Albans, and his efforts afterwards to recover it were fruitless.

The publication of *The Task* and *John Gilpin* in the summer of 1885 made Cowper famous. Even his neighbours at Olney—and neighbours are generally the last to recognise that there can be anything out of the common in a man whom they see walking about every day—admitted that their fellow-townsmen was a genius. The curate, Mr. Scott, expressed his admiration, and the schoolmaster, Samuel Teedon, carefully pointed out to the author all the beauties in his own poems, lest the poet himself should have overlooked them. But better than the fame, deserved as it was, and lasting as it has proved, which the volume brought him, was the renewal of his friendship with his beloved cousin, Lady Hesketh. After a mutual silence of many years she wrote to him in the autumn of 1785, and the letter came like sunshine into the quiet parlour at Orchard Side.

It would be doing great injustice to Lady Hesketh to suppose that it was the establishment of Cowper's reputation which induced her, as it seems to have induced other friends of former days, Thurlow and Colman, to renew acquaintance with him. She had ceased to correspond with him when he sank into a religious melancholy which she deplored, and which, with characteristic good sense, she attributed in large measure to its real cause, the eternal praying and preaching of Mr. Newton. She renewed the correspondence with her cousin, whom she always loved and befriended, when his published writings gave evidence that he had recovered a healthier tone of mind, and when accordingly she need not fear being drawn by him into a bootless religious controversy. She seems to have been an admirable woman, of a good understanding, a cheerful equable temper, and a warm heart. From her portrait, painted by Cotes in 1755, we may judge that she was handsome ; those who remembered her in her prime spoke of her as a brilliant beauty who drew all eyes on her at Ranelagh.

It was a happy day for Cowper when, coming down to breakfast on an October morning in 1785, he saw on the table a letter franked by his uncle, Ashley Cowper, and on opening it found a letter from Lady Hesketh. It was the beginning of a fresh correspondence in which he poured out to her all the wealth of his brotherly affection, all the playful humour and gaiety of his naturally serene and cheerful disposition. In one of his early letters to her at this period, in answer perhaps to some enquiries of hers, he describes himself as a very smart youth of his years (which were fifty-four in number), rather bald than grey, with enough hair of his own to curl at his ears, and to hang down a little below the bag-wig which he wore, with a black riband about his neck. From his account



of himself in *The Task*, published that summer, we know that advancing years had not yet pilfered from him

*“ The elastic spring of an unwearied foot  
That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,  
That play of lungs inhaling and again  
Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes  
Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me.”*

Nor had they impaired his relish of fair prospects ; the scenes that soothed and charmed him in his youth still soothed and charmed him growing old, when he gazed on them with his arm fast locked in hers, the dear companion of his walks through twenty winters.

With the renewal of her correspondence Lady Hesketh, now a widow by the death of Sir Thomas Hesketh a few years before, opened the springs of her bounty, and Cowper's letters to her are full of thanks for the substantial marks of her kindness and affection which frequently arrived at Orchard Side. With them, too, came from time to time presents from a nameless benefactor, whom Cowper calls Anonymous, and who appears to have been, though he never guessed the secret, his forgotten, but never forgetful love, Theodora Cowper. From writing to his cousin it was natural that Cowper should entertain the wish to see her again. The wish was mutual and was shared by Mrs. Unwin. Accordingly during the winter it was arranged between them that Lady Hesketh should come to them at Olney in the following June. As Orchard Side was not commodious enough to lodge her and her servants in comfort, apartments were engaged for her at a house opposite.

Thenceforth Cowper's letters to his cousin contain many references to the pleasure which he anticipated from her visit in the coming summer. Seated by the fireside one wintry afternoon he saw her chamber windows across the

way coated with snow, and he thought how the roses would begin to blow and the heat perhaps to be troublesome before Lady Hesketh would be with them. And as the time drew nearer his impatience to see her increased. In his letters he speaks of the walks they would take together, especially to Weston, their pleasantest retreat of all, though the road thither was shadeless all the way. But he went no more, he said, to the field by the Ouse where the poplars used to make a cool colonnade, their tops rustling in the breeze and their images reflected in the placid stream; for the trees were felled, and though the prospect from the field was still beautiful, it had ceased to attract him. And writing one May morning, while the grass under the windows was bespangled with dewdrops and the birds were singing among the blossoms of the apple-trees, he tells how the day before they had taken their customary walk in the Wilderness at Weston, had seen with regret the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some in bloom, some about to blow, and had remembered that all these would be gone by the time Lady Hesketh was come. And though he consoled himself with the thought that there would be roses, and jasmine, and honeysuckle, and shady walks, and cool alcoves, yet he grudged that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before she could come to enjoy it.

Lodgings were finally engaged for her, not at the house opposite Orchard Side, but at the vicarage, the same lodgings which Lady Austen had occupied before. The vicarage was then in a dreary comfortless condition, almost bare of furniture, for the vicar, Moses Browne, an old man of eighty-six, lived in it alone, without even a servant, and waited on only by a woman who made his bed, dressed his dinner, and left him to his lucubrations. Furniture had to be put in and other

preparations made for the comfort of Lady Hesketh and the three servants she was to bring with her. These arrangements were actively carried out by Mrs. Unwin, and Cowper in his letters to his cousin describes the house, and the smart furniture with which, under Mrs. Unwin's superintendence, it was being garnished. The vicarage was a new house, neatly built of stone with sash windows ; the square garden was enclosed with walls, but was shadeless except for the shadow of the house ; the windows of Lady Hesketh's chamber commanded a view over the meadows and the river, with the long bridge occupying a conspicuous place in the foreground, and the road winding away in the distance. Her bed was draped with a superb coverlet of printed cotton adorned with classical subjects ; every morning she would open her eyes on Phaethon kneeling to Apollo, and imploring him to grant him the conduct of the chariot of the sun for a day.

So at last, after some delays and disappointments, Lady Hesketh arrived, and in her cheerful company Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were happier than they had ever been before at Olney. Nor were they the only people in the town to whom the presence of the kind-hearted lady brought smiles and sunshine. Every time she went out she took with her coppers in a velvet bag with which she made the children happy. Many years afterwards, when Cowper and his friends had long been dead and gone, an old woman of Olney remembered this Lady Bountiful, and the poet himself in his white cap and suit of green turned up with buff,<sup>1</sup> and the little

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Miller, *First Impressions of England and its People* (Edinburgh, 1889), chapter xv., pp. 253 *sq.* The old woman said "green turned up with black," but I have ventured to correct her memory by Cowper's own statement : "Green and buff are colours in which I am oftener seen than in any others, and are become almost as natural to me as to a parrot."

dog Beau trotting beside them—a smart petted creature with silken ears, who one summer day made himself famous for ever by plunging into the Ouse and bringing back in his mouth a water-lily which his master had vainly tried to reach with his stick.

The arrival of Lady Hesketh at Olney soon led to an important change in the life of her two friends. She was dissatisfied, not without cause, both with Olney and with their house. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were fond of rural walks, and largely depended on them for the maintenance of their health and spirits ; but at Olney they had suffered much in health from confinement, for in winter the roads in the neighbourhood were muddy and in summer they were hot and shadeless, so that by the time the two friends reached their favourite haunt, the woods of Weston, they were tired, and it was time to return. A gravel walk in their garden, about thirty yards long, was the only promenade on which they could count in all weathers, and as Cowper observed, it afforded but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty ; the battlements of the Tower, he says, had he been confined a prisoner to that fortress, would have furnished him with a larger space for exercise. Fortunately at this time a good house, belonging to Mr. Throckmorton and close to his pleasure-grounds, was vacant at Weston ; within a few days of Lady Hesketh's arrival it was settled that the friends were to take it and move into it in the autumn.<sup>1</sup>

Cowper was delighted with the prospect. "Lady Hesketh," he writes, "is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air, and a more walkable

<sup>1</sup> From Letters CLXXIV. and CLXXV. we see that Lady Hesketh had not arrived at Olney by June 12, 1786, and that by June 19, only a week later, the house was already taken and the removal settled.



country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here for so many winters has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer, she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood." The village of Weston, he says, is one of the prettiest villages in England, terminated at one end by the church tower seen through trees and at the other by a very handsome gateway, opening into a fine grove of elms ; and the walks round about are at all seasons of the year delightful.<sup>1</sup> The house itself, facing the village street on one side and a garden and orchard on the other, is a pleasant commodious old dwelling ; and though in poetical language Cowper might call it a cottage or a hermitage, he reminds us that when poets speak of such a thing they always mean a house with six sash windows in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bedrooms of convenient size ; in short, a house answering exactly to the Lodge at Weston, which was to be thenceforth his home. Lady Hesketh spared no expense in fitting up the house for the comfort of the new tenants, and they moved into it on the 16th of November 1786. Their old house at Olney had been falling into disrepair and threatened to tumble about their ears ; and when it stood empty the candidates for the tenancy were a shoemaker and a publican, who kept the Horse and Groom at Olney. Yet the poet tells us that he could not look for the last time without a pang of regret on the ruinous abode, where he had been unhappy for so many years, and that he felt something like a heartache at

<sup>1</sup> The village and the park seem to have changed very little since Cowper's time, except that the Hall has been pulled down, and the road now runs through " the very handsome gateway " mentioned by the poet. The church is a plain grey building with a short square tower, standing on somewhat higher ground at the western end of the village.

bidding farewell to a scene that had nothing in itself to engage affection.

But when the domestic chaos inseparable from the removal to a new house had somewhat subsided, Cowper began thoroughly to enjoy his new surroundings. Though the weather was wintry, the house was always snug and warm, and he could ramble every day in a new direction with short grass under his feet, and come home after a walk of five miles with shoes not too dirty for a drawing-room. On these rambles he was sometimes joined by the Throckmortons, who continued to be the most obliging of neighbours. In their company he walked to the cliff, a beautiful terrace sloping gently down to the Ouse, from the brow of which the view over the valley far surpassed any that could be had from what Cowper calls the hills near Olney. But scarcely had the friends begun to enjoy the pleasantness of their new situation, and to find as much comfort as the season of the year would permit, when their happiness was marred by a heavy bereavement. William Unwin, Cowper's friend and Mrs. Unwin's son, died of a putrid fever at Winchester, on a tour which he had taken with a friend to the west of England. He is buried in the south aisle of Winchester Cathedral.

After he had finished *The Task* and sent away the last proof-sheet corrected, Cowper very soon felt the need of engaging in some other literary labour in order to divert his thoughts from the melancholy themes on which, in hours of idleness, he was apt to brood. One day, being in great distress of mind, he took up the *Iliad*, and, merely to turn his attention, translated the first twelve lines of the poem. The same necessity pressing on him, he had recourse again and again to the same expedient, till gradually he conceived the plan of making a complete new verse translation of Homer. Upon this task he soon set

to work in earnest ; it furnished him with unremitting occupation for about six years, proving indeed, though not the most important, by far the most laborious of his literary undertakings. The translation was begun at Olney in 1785, only a few weeks after the completion of *The Task* ; and the book was published by subscription in two handsome quarto volumes by Joseph Johnson at London in July 1791.

In the interval his letters contain many allusions to his strenuous labours in the Homeric field, and many valuable critical remarks on the literary art. It is impossible to read them, and similar remarks scattered through his correspondence, without recognising the endless pains which Cowper took to give the most perfect polish he could command to every one of the many thousands of verses which flowed from his pen. Yet it may be safely affirmed that no writer has left fewer traces of the literary file than he has done in his writings. All his productions are characterised by a seemingly spontaneous and natural flow, as if they had tripped off his pen without premeditation and without effort. It is only from his own frank and repeated confessions, or rather professions, that we learn the labour that it cost him thus to give to art the appearance of nature. On the other hand he tells us, and there is every reason to believe him, that he took no pains whatever with the composition of his letters, but reeled them off helter-skelter as fast as his pen would run. The reason for the difference was that while his poems, at least all the longer ones, were intended for the public eye, his letters were written purely for his private friends, and he never dreamed of their being published. He did not, like Pope, sit at his desk with one eye turned to his correspondent and the other, the weather eye, fixed immovably upon the public ;

his object was simply to chat with a friend at a distance, it was not, like that of the little man at Twickenham, to pose before the world as a paragon of virtue and genius. All such literary artifices, indeed affectations of every sort, were abhorrent to the honest mind of Cowper. That is why the letters of Pope are so nauseous, and the letters of Cowper so delightful. The letters of the one reek of the midnight oil, the letters of the other breathe the fresh perfume of the flowers and the fields he loved. Many of Cowper's original letters are preserved, and they fully bear out all that he himself tells us as to the perfect ease and fluency with which they were written ; for "they are in a clear, beautiful, running hand, and it is rarely that an erasure occurs in them, or the slightest alteration of phrase."<sup>1</sup>

While we may regret that Cowper devoted to a translation of Homer the time and labour which might have been better employed in the composition of original masterpieces, we must admit that in his mental state constant literary occupation was almost a necessity for him, and that so far as he found it in Homer, he benefited personally by his devotion to the task, though the world in general was the loser by it. In the execution of the laborious undertaking he received much cordial assistance of various kinds from friends. Not long after he had put himself into the Homeric harness, he received a visit from his old schoolfellow, the Rev. Walter Bagot, who hearing of the poet's new venture subscribed to the translation, and undertook to procure subscriptions among his friends and acquaintances, many of them people of high rank and wealth. Cowper's old and ever-faithful

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Works of William Cowper*, by Robert Southey, vol. i. p. 314. Some of the letters are now exhibited in the poet's house at Olney, which has been turned into a museum. They confirm Southey's description.



friend, Joseph Hill, also bestirred himself in beating up for subscribers to the Homer. A new friend, who helped him in the labour of transcribing his translation for the press, was a young man, Samuel Rose. The son of a schoolmaster at Chiswick, he studied at the University of Glasgow, and on his way from Glasgow to London in January 1787, turned six miles out of his way to visit Cowper at Weston, drawn by his admiration of the poet's writings, and charged with compliments for him from some of the Scotch professors. Next year he paid a visit to Weston, when Lady Hesketh was also staying there, and in a letter written at the time he has given a pleasing account of the happy regular life they led in each other's company. They breakfasted about half-past nine, and spent an hour over it in lively conversation, enjoying themselves most wonderfully. Then they separated to their various tasks and occupations ; Cowper to translate Homer, Rose to copy what was already translated, Lady Hesketh to work or read, "and Mrs. Unwin, who in everything but her face, is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavour. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time ; when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent, virtuous pleasure. Can you wonder that I should feel melancholy at the thought of leaving such a

family; or rather, will you not be surprised at my resolution to depart from this quiet scene on Thursday next?" It was through Rose that Cowper became acquainted with the poetry of Burns, for whose natural genius he expresses admiration, though he wishes that the Scotch bard would divest himself of his "uncouth dialect," and "content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel."

Several years later, in January 1790, Cowper made the personal acquaintance of a young kinsman, who was to play a very important part in the remainder of the poet's life. This was John Johnson, "Johnny of Norfolk," as Cowper familiarly calls him. He was a grandson of Cowper's maternal uncle, Roger Donne, who had been rector of Catfield in Norfolk. At this time he was a student at Cambridge and made use of a Christmas vacation to introduce himself to his now famous relative at Weston. Cowper conceived a warm affection for the young man, who, though somewhat bashful, appears to have been very engaging, full of light-hearted gaiety and humour. When he was about to take orders not long afterwards, Cowper warned him to adopt a somewhat more sober deportment, inasmuch as the spectacle of a skipping, curvetting, bounding divine might not be altogether to the taste of his parishioners. The youth returned the poet's affection, and when he left Weston, after his first visit, he carried off with him several books of Homer to write out fair from Cowper's foul copy. On the completion of the whole work in September 1790, young Johnson conveyed the precious and voluminous manuscript, the result of five years' labour, to his namesake the publisher in London. "He has gone," says Cowper, "with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is,

and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less."

Another indirect result of John Johnson's first visit to Weston was to give birth to one of Cowper's most justly celebrated poems. The young man had observed with what affection Cowper spoke of his mother. The only portrait of her in existence was in possession of her niece Mrs. Bodham, Johnson's aunt, whom the poet had known and loved in her childhood. She was his cousin, Anne Donne, daughter of his mother's brother. Born at Catfield in Norfolk in 1748, she married in 1781 the Rev. Thomas Bodham, of Mattishall Hall in Norfolk, whom she survived for nearly fifty years, dying at a great age in 1846. On hearing from her nephew of the tender memories which Cowper cherished of his mother, Mrs. Bodham kindly and generously made him a present of the portrait. The arrival of the picture made a deep impression on him; he thanked Mrs. Bodham warmly for it, and celebrated the event in immortal verse.

Among those who took a warm interest in the progress of Cowper's translation of Homer were his attached friends at Weston Park, the Throckmortons. Both Mrs. Throckmorton and her husband's younger brother, Mr. George Throckmorton (afterwards Mr. Courtenay), acted as his amanuensis in making fair copies of his rough manuscript. When Lady Hesketh visited Cowper for the first time at Olney in the summer of 1786, she transcribed Homer for him, but on her departure Mrs. Throckmorton solicited the office of scribe and undertook to be the translator's "lady of the ink-bottle" for the rest of the winter. At the same time, when the move to Weston had been decided on, but not yet carried out, the reserve between the friends wearing off, Mr. Throckmorton talked to Cowper with great pleasure of the

comfort he proposed to himself from their winter-evening conversations, his purpose apparently being that the two families should spend their evenings alternately with each other. These happy anticipations appear to have been perfectly fulfilled so long as the Throckmortons, or Frogs, as Cowper affectionately calls them, continued to reside at Weston. In Cowper's letters there are many pleasing glimpses of the constant and friendly intercourse between the Lodge and the Hall. One day, for example, when he was expecting Lady Hesketh's arrival and was doubtful which of two roads she should take, one being heavy and the other rough, he met the Frogs armed with bows and arrows going to practise at the target in the garden. On putting the question to them, Mrs. Frog cut a caper on the grass-plot and said she would go ride to Olney immediately on purpose to examine the road. Sometimes Mrs. Frog drove him over to pay a morning call on the Chesters at Chicheley. On one of these occasions, dressed in state for the call, and awaiting the arrival of two chaises, with a strong party of ladies, the shy poet looked with envy at a poor old woman coming up the lane, and thought how happy she was to be exempted by her situation in life from making herself fine of a morning and going in a chaise to pay visits. He was more at his ease in a quiet sociable evening at the Hall, while Mr. Throckmorton spoke to him of his Homer "with sparkling eyes and a face expressive of the highest pleasure," or Mrs. Throckmorton played to him on the harpsichord.

These kind neighbours he lost in March 1792, when on the death of his father, Sir Robert Throckmorton, Mr. John Throckmorton succeeded to the baronetcy and removed with his wife, now Lady Throckmorton, to the family estate of Bucklands in Berkshire. He was suc-



ceeded at Weston Hall by his younger brother George Throckmorton, who had changed his name to Courtenay. His wife Mrs. Courtenay was Cowper's correspondent Catharina. She had been a Miss Stapleton, and even before her marriage Cowper had known and liked her at the Hall, where she played and sang like an angel. Her union with Mr. Courtenay, which took place in the summer of 1792, made the poet happy. She and her husband proved no less kind and friendly neighbours than their predecessors. When Cowper went to the Hall to pay his first visit to them after their marriage, Mr. Courtenay flew into the court to meet him, and when he entered the parlour Catharina sprang into his arms.

But the poet went that summer day alone to the Hall. A great sorrow had befallen him. For some years Mrs. Unwin's health had been failing. In January 1789 she fell on the gravel walk, then slippery with ice, and though she neither broke nor dislocated any bones, she received an injury which for a time crippled her entirely. She recovered the power of walking and resumed her household duties, but it may be doubted whether she ever was quite strong again. In the following summer Cowper mentions that the day before he had dined with Mrs. Throckmorton alone at the Hall, the ways being miry and Mrs. Unwin no longer able to walk in pattens or clogs. During the next two years she suffered almost constantly from a pain in her side, which nearly forbade her the use of the pen, so that she could not transcribe Cowper's verses.

But much worse was to follow. One Saturday in December 1791, while Cowper was at his desk near the window and Mrs. Unwin was seated in her chair at the fireside, he suddenly heard her cry, "Oh! Mr.

Cowper, don't let me fall!" He sprang to her and with difficulty caught and raised her as she was falling with her chair to the floor. She had been seized with a violent dizziness, which affected her sight and her speech, though she did not lose consciousness. It was a paralytic stroke. However, the symptoms gradually abated, and she slowly recovered. But in the following May (1792) she was struck again, this time much more severely; her speech became almost unintelligible, her features distorted, she could hardly open her eyes, and she lost entirely the use of her right hand and arm. Nevertheless she again partially recovered; electricity was applied with seemingly good results. Early in June her speech was nearly perfect, her eyes open almost all day, and her step greatly improved. By the middle of the month, though still feeble, she could walk down and up stairs, leaning with one hand on Cowper's arm and the other on the balustrade. In this sad and anxious time Cowper seems to have borne up wonderfully, exerting himself to the utmost to repay by unremitting attention to the beloved invalid all the care that for so many years she had lavished on him. Writing to his publisher in July he says: "Days, weeks, and months escape me, and nothing is done, nor is it possible for me to do anything that demands study and attention in the present state of our family. I am the electrician; I am the escort into the garden; I am wanted, in short, on a hundred little occasions that occur every day in Mrs. Unwin's present state of infirmity; and I see no probability that I shall be less occupied in the same indispensable duties for a long time to come." Indeed, the two fast friends had seen their brightest hours together, and the clouded evening of their life drew on apace. Yet even now the descending sun broke through the gathering clouds to bid them a last, a sweet farewell.

They had made a new friend who was to cheer and comfort them both for a while in their sad decline. The friend was William Hayley.

Immediately on the conclusion of his long Homeric labours Cowper, to whose mental health steady occupation was essential, cast about for something else to do, and thought for a while that he had found it in editing and annotating a splendid edition of Milton's poetical works, which was to be published by Joseph Johnson, and illustrated with thirty pictures by the painter Fuseli, a man of fine literary taste, who had criticised minutely the proof-sheets of Cowper's Homer. In spite of the poet's warm admiration for Milton and his intimate acquaintance with his poetry, the office of editor and commentator imposed an irksome restraint on his original genius, curbing and bridling his Pegasus even more effectually than Homer had done; it weighed on instead of lightening his spirits, and had to be ultimately renounced. But it brought incidentally the advantage of making him acquainted with Hayley, who, happening to be then engaged on a *Life of Milton*, and reading in the newspapers a paragraph which described himself and Cowper as rivals in the Miltonic field, wrote to the poet a generous letter full of admiration for his genius, and disclaiming all intentions of doing anything that would clash with the projected edition of Milton's works. Cowper answered in the same spirit, and the two poets became warm friends.

For a poet Hayley was in his time, though his poetry has long passed into oblivion. Indeed, the literary critics of the day, some of whom had poured contempt on Cowper's first volume, hailed the first public appearance of Hayley as that of a new and bright star on the poetical horizon. They perceived in him an almost

unrivalled excellence, an imagination truly creative, and a judgment critically exact. The inimitable pen of this masterly writer, we are informed, drew animated portraits with admirable truth and precision. He combined the fire and invention of Dryden with the wit and ease of Prior, and if his versification was a shade less polished than that of Pope, it was very much more various. Meretricious ornaments he studiously eschewed, and though his ideas were conceived in the finest vein of poetical frenzy, they were expressed with the most elegant perspicuity and the chastest simplicity. To crown all, he believed in revealed religion. This was enough. The bard was swept up to the seventh poetical heaven in a halo of glory and a whirlwind of praise. The public, stimulated by the blast of the critical trumpet, purchased his works with a perseverance worthy of a better cause. They were distributed as prizes, they were bestowed as presents; the perusal of them reformed the character of intractable young ladies, and kindled a flame in the bosom of nursery-gardeners, who refused to accept payment for their wares from the great man when they discovered his identity. The surly Thurlow complimented him. Pitt offered him the laureateship. In short, he stood for a time on the lofty pedestal which had been lately vacated by the imperishable Pye, and was afterwards adorned by the immortal Tupper. But it could not last. The time came to knock him down and put up another in his place. The thing was soon done. The brazen trumpet again rang out: the public gaped at the last new idol; and poor Hayley was forgotten.

But if he was an indifferent poet, Hayley was an affectionate friend, as free as Cowper himself from those mean passions of envy and jealousy which in the opinion of a censorious world are peculiarly apt to wring the



breasts of authors. He used all his influence with Thurlow to extract from him a pension for Cowper. He artfully presented the chancellor's bastard daughter with a copy of Cowper's poems; he breakfasted with the great man himself, and exerted his utmost powers of personal fascination, which were considerable, but it was all to no purpose; for though, being a man of sanguine temperament, he left the breakfast table in high feather under the impression that he had softened the nether millstone of Thurlow's heart, nothing but disappointment came of the interview.

However, Hayley did much better for Cowper than get him a pension. He visited him at Weston in May 1792, and by his amiable manners, his buoyant, lively disposition, and agreeable conversation he won the hearts and cheered the lives of the two recluses. On his side Hayley was no less charmed with them. Writing from Weston to his friend the painter Romney, he says: "Often have I wished to convey you by magic to my side, when you were not near me; but I believe I never wished it more ardently than I have done under this very kind poetical roof. You would be pleased here, as I am, and think with me, that my brother bard is one of the most interesting creatures in the world, from the powerful united influence of rare genius and singular misfortunes, with the additional charm of mild and engaging manners. Then as to the grand article of females, (for what is a scene without a woman in it?) here is a muse of seventy, that I perfectly idolize. Here is a wonderful scene; it would affect you, I know, as it does me. Few things in life have given me such heartfelt satisfaction as my visit to this house; and the more so as my kind hosts seem to regard me as sent to them by Providence, for our general delight and

advantage.”<sup>1</sup> And in the biographical notices which he interspersed in his posthumous edition of Cowper’s letters he thus writes of his first visit to Weston: “My host, though now in his sixty-first year, appeared as happily exempt from all the infirmities of advanced life, as friendship could wish him to be; and his more elderly companion, not materially oppressed by age, discovered a benevolent alertness of character that seemed to promise a continuance of their domestic comfort. Their reception of me was kindness itself: I was enchanted to find that the manners and conversation of Cowper resembled his poetry, charming by unaffected elegance, and the graces of a benevolent spirit. I looked with affectionate veneration and pleasure on the lady, who having devoted her life and fortune to the service of this tender and sublime genius, in watching over him with maternal vigilance through many years of the darkest calamity, appeared to be now enjoying a reward justly due to the noblest exertions of friendship, in contemplating the health and the renown of the poet whom she had the happiness to preserve. It seemed hardly possible to survey human nature in a more touching and a more satisfactory point of view. Their tender attention to each other, their simple devout gratitude for the mercies which they had experienced together, and their constant, but unaffected, propensity to impress on the mind and heart of a new friend, the deep sense, which they incessantly felt, of their mutual obligations to each other, afforded me very singular gratification.”

The mutual happiness of the friends in each other’s society was sadly dashed by Mrs. Unwin’s second stroke

<sup>1</sup> Hayley somewhat exaggerates Mrs. Unwin’s age. Having been born in 1724 she was then (1792) about sixty-eight. Cowper, born in 1731, was about seven years younger.

of paralysis, which befel her one afternoon when Cowper and Hayley, after a morning passed in study, were out walking together. The melancholy news was communicated to them on their return by Mr. Samuel Greatheed, a dissenting minister of Newport Pagnell, who happened to be calling at the Lodge. Hayley was able to soothe his friend's agitation, and his tender attentions to the invalid endeared him still more to the poet. After spending more than a fortnight with his friends at Weston, he left them on the first of June, stealing quietly out of the house in the morning lest he should wake Mrs. Unwin, and leaving a pencilled note for Cowper in a song-book.

But before he departed it had been arranged between them that if Mrs. Unwin's health permitted it, she and Cowper should pay him a visit in the course of the summer at his home in Sussex. Hayley then resided at Eartham, a small estate delightfully situated on high ground about six miles from Chichester and five from Arundel. He had inherited the property from his father, and had enlarged the house and embellished the garden. The pleasure-grounds, interspersed with rural grottoes and ivied seats, occupied three sides of a hill crowned with an arbour. House and grounds commanded beautiful views over a deep fertile valley enclosed by wooded hills, and away to the sea, nine miles distant, and the Isle of Wight looking like a thick cloud on the horizon. Gibbon, who visited Hayley at Eartham, and whose portrait hung in the library, called the place a little Paradise.

As the summer wore on, Mrs. Unwin's health gradually improved, and in spite of many fears and misgivings on Cowper's part, it was finally decided that they should go together to Eartham at the beginning of August. It was a tremendous undertaking for two people who had lived

so quiet and secluded a life, and had never been more than a few miles distant from home for many years. A coach and four was sent from London to convey them. Johnny of Norfolk, Cowper's man-servant Samuel Roberts, his wife, and the little dog Beau, went with them. At eight o'clock in the morning of the first of August 1792 the coach drew up at the door of the Lodge. Samuel mounted the box, the rest got in, and they all drove off in good spirits. The journey occupied three days: the weather was very hot and the roads dusty. They lodged the first night at the Mitre in Barnet, where they found their friend Mr. Rose, who had walked thither from his house in Chancery Lane to meet them. His presence and conversation afforded a welcome relief to the weary and jaded spirits of the two unaccustomed travellers after their long confinement and jolting in the coach. Unfortunately the inn was very noisy, and Cowper was driven almost to despair for Mrs. Unwin, lest she should get no rest. But though she was so weary that she could hardly speak she slept well and rose refreshed. On the second day they dined at Kingston, where Cowper met his old friend, General Cowper, whom he had not seen for thirty years, and at night they lodged at Ripley, six miles from Guildford, in a quiet inn which they had all to themselves. There they both slept well and in the morning felt quite rested. Next day brought them to Eartham about ten o'clock at night. Darkness had fallen and the moon had risen when they crossed the Sussex downs, and Cowper, who had never seen a hill in his life, confesses that he was daunted by their "tremendous height" looming dim above him in the moonlight. Mrs. Unwin bore the journey better than Cowper dared to hope, and after the undisturbed slumbers of two good



nights at Eartham she was more cheerful than she had been for many months.

In Hayley's hospitable home the two friends spent six happy weeks. The weather was at first fine, and in the brisker air and on the drier chalk soil Mrs. Unwin could, with support, walk better than at Weston. Sometimes she would pace the gravel walks of the hanging gardens ; sometimes she would be drawn in a chaise by Hayley's son, Tom, and a servant lad, while Cowper or Johnny of Norfolk pushed behind ; sometimes she would sit with Cowper in the bower on the top of the hill, tranquilly enjoying the distant prospects and the air blowing sweet and fresh. But she could not amuse herself by knitting or reading, for her sight remained imperfect and her fingers refused to perform their office. Cowper himself slept much better than at home and his appetite was improved ; Johnny of Norfolk thought him looking ten times younger than he had ever seen him before ; he laughed from morning to night and was quite blooming and active. But surrounded by strange objects he found his attention so dissipated that he could hardly even write a letter ; and he confessed himself so unaccountably local in the use of his pen that, like the man in the fable who could leap nowhere but at Rhodes, he was incapable of writing anywhere but at Weston.

However, he found plenty of occupation. The morning hours which could be spared for books were chiefly devoted to revising and correcting, with Hayley's help, all the translations which he had made of Milton's Latin and Italian poems for the projected edition of his works ; and after dinner the friends generally amused themselves with composing jointly a rapid metrical version of Andreini's *Adamo*, an Italian drama published at Milan in 1613, which Hayley, following a hint of Voltaire's, supposed to

have influenced Milton's choice of the subject for his great epic. Cowper, too, gave some time to sitting for his likeness to the painter Romney, who was among the guests at Eartham. The portrait, drawn in crayons, was esteemed by his friends very like. It is perhaps the best known of the three portraits of the poet. Shortly before his departure for Eartham he had been painted by Abbot, and in the following year he was painted by Lawrence.

Among the guests at Eartham during Cowper's stay was Mrs. Charlotte Smith, who was then engaged in writing her best novel *The Old Manor House*. The early part of the day she devoted to composition in her own room, and in the evening she read to the assembled party what she had written, charming her hearers by the simplicity and grace of her elocution and delivery. Cowper repeatedly declared that among his early associates, some of whom prided themselves on rapid composition, he knew of none who could have composed so rapidly and well. Another visitor who came to Eartham to meet Cowper was his correspondent the Rev. James Hurdis, rector of Bishopsgate in Sussex. Deeply affected by the death of his sister he had resigned his living and was about to settle at Oxford, where he afterwards became Professor of Poetry. He and Cowper met at Eartham for the first and only time. Nor among the friends gathered at Hayley's pleasant home should Cowper's little dog, Beau, be forgotten. He had ridden in the coach with his master from Weston, and when Hayley, his son Tom, and the painter, Romney, set off to the sea to bathe, Beau went with them. Whether he enjoyed battling with the salt waves on the beach as much as swimming in the sluggish waters of the Ouse and gathering water-lilies on its calm bosom, is not recorded by history.

A greater contrast can hardly be conceived than that which was presented by these peaceful scenes at Eartham, and the scenes of tumult and horror which were then being enacted at Paris, whither Cowper's friends the Throckmortons had gone on a visit. For Paris was then at the height of the revolutionary frenzy. While the poet worked at his books with Hayley in the quiet library with its windows looking away over the beautiful landscape, or accompanied Mrs. Unwin in her walks in the garden, or sat with her in the arbour, fanned by the fresh breezes from the distant sea, the palace of the Tuileries was being stormed, the Swiss Guard cut to pieces, the King and Queen made captive, and the dreadful September massacres were being perpetrated at the prisons. It was with a great sense of relief that Cowper learned that Sir John and Lady Throckmorton had quitted Paris two days before the terrible tenth of August.

So in happy social intercourse, literary occupation, and enjoyment of nature the weeks at Eartham glided pleasantly away. But the days were shortening, the autumn was advancing, the weather after the first fortnight had turned wet and stormy, and Cowper began to long to be at home again. The beautiful scenery and manifold charms of Eartham, he assures his correspondents, had not alienated his affections from the peaceful, though less splendid, Weston ; the prospects which met his eye from every window, of woods like forests and hills like mountains, rather deepened than alleviated his natural melancholy, and he preferred the snug concealment of the Buckinghamshire village, which to him was the dearest spot on earth. So on the seventeenth of September the two friends set out for home. With a heavy heart Cowper took leave of Hayley, with a heavy heart he bade farewell to Tom at the foot of the chalk hill ; but soon after his

troubles gushed from his eyes, and then he was better. They spent four days on the return journey, for it had been agreed that they should dine one day with the poet's kinsman, General Cowper, and for that purpose it was necessary that they should pass a night at Kingston, near which the General lived. Cowper looked forward to the visit with great trepidation of spirits ; but it passed off well, the two old friends parted, never to meet again, and Cowper and Mrs. Unwin returned more cheerfully in the dark to Kingston. That night they rested well, and next morning soon after eight set off for London, which Cowper was to look upon also for the last time. At ten in the morning they arrived at Mr. Rose's door in Chancery Lane, drank chocolate with him, and proceeded on their journey, Mr. Rose riding with them as far as St. Albans. From there they met with no impediment ; in the dark and in a storm they reached their own back door at eight o'clock at night.

Soon after their return Cowper attempted to settle down to his task work at Milton, but it was to little purpose. The stream of his genius refused to flow in a prescribed channel ; his Pegasus would not gallop under a bit and snaffle. In vain did he set his teeth and sit down to his desk with a good pen, a full ink-bottle, and a clean sheet of paper spread out before him ; after writing and blotting a few lines he had to relinquish the attempt. The ghost of Milton seemed to haunt him and to goad him with continual reproaches for his neglect. He turned from the ungrateful task and buried himself in a revision of his *Homer*, which was for him a labour of love to be performed of his own free will and at his own time, not a matter of contract to be executed to date for a bookseller. In order that he might give the whole of the day to waiting on Mrs. Unwin, who in the en-



feebled state of her body and mind needed and exacted all his attention, he used to rise at six and fag at Homer, fasting till eleven o'clock, when he breakfasted. In winter he was up before daybreak while the owls were still hooting, and he sat by the window to catch the first glimmer of daylight, sometimes so cold that the pen slipped from his benumbed fingers. When the weather was fair, he regularly walked with Mrs. Unwin in the orchard at the back of the house, where he had made a new path sheltered from the north and facing the south-western sun. But Mrs. Unwin was now so crippled that on these walks she had always to be supported between two and could only creep. In the evening he read to her his revised translation of Homer or some other book, such as Baker's *Chronicle*, in which he hoped in time to be as well versed as Sir Roger de Coverley, who used to keep the book lying on his hall window and occasionally unbend his mind, after the serious business of hunting foxes or sentencing poachers, by perusing the annals of his country.

The reason which induced Cowper to revise his Homer was one, he said, which any poet may guess if he will only thrust his hand into his pocket. At the same time, in deference to criticisms which had been passed on his translation, he attempted to adapt it to the over-delicate taste of the day by rendering the Latinisms into plain English, by expunging the occasional inversions which had given dignity to the verse, and by planing down the rougher lines, which the poet himself had deemed indispensable to secure variety of cadence. When all these changes had been made, he hoped to give to far the greater number of his verses a flow as smooth as oil, to convert the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into plain turnpike, along which the most fastidious or squeamish reader might

glide without experiencing a single jolt to distract his attention or disturb his slumber. Of this excessive smoothness of versification Cowper himself decidedly disapproved. "A critic of the present day," he says, "serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post, and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope ; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly, rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them !"

But while in his Homer, as in all his original poems, Cowper took the utmost pains to satisfy his own fine sense of literary workmanship, and to meet all reasonable and even some unreasonable demands of criticism, he never replied to any of his critics in print. Like another wise and magnanimous man, the target of many envenomed shafts—David Hume—he disdained to engage in the squabbling and scuffling, the clouting of heads and the clawing of faces, which goes by the name of literary controversy.<sup>1</sup> With a sensitiveness and delicacy of nature more than feminine, he happily combined a robust and manly strain of thought which made him rise superior to petty wounds that would have rankled in weaker natures.

<sup>1</sup> "Answers by Reverends and Right Reverends came out two or three in a year ; and I found, by Dr. Warburton's railing, that the books were beginning to be esteemed in good company. However, I had a fixed resolution, which I inflexibly maintained, never to reply to any body ; and not being very irascible in my temper, I have easily kept myself clear of all literary squabbles." DAVID HUME, *My Own Life*.

His equanimity was never ruffled, or at all events never seriously disturbed, by the attacks of critics. He could afford to disregard them and to bide his time. *His* works will last with the English language : *their* criticisms have long been forgotten.

Cowper had other and deeper than pecuniary motives for applying himself zealously to Homer. The occupation served to divert his mind for a time from sad sights and melancholy reflections. His spirits were low and as time went on they sank lower and lower. Even shortly after his return from Eartham he wrote to Hayley in a tone of despondence that all his sprightly chords seemed broken ; he thought that perhaps the approach of winter was the cause, but alas ! spring and summer were to bring few joys to him again. No doubt a principal source of his unhappiness was the spectacle, always before his eyes, of Mrs. Unwin's steady decline. Her eyes and her fingers never recovered the powers they had lost by the second stroke of palsy. She never knitted again. The knitting-needles, once so shining, now rusted unused. She who had been wont to rise by candle-light because the daylight was not long enough for the important business of mending stockings and other housewifely cares, now sat in her corner silent, with idle hands, gazing at the fire. For a while Cowper cheated, or tried to cheat himself, with the hope that she would still recover what she had lost, that she would yet read and work again as of old. But at last he saw that the hope was vain, and wrote the pathetic verses, *To Mary*, which will embalm her memory and his so long as the English language endures. They are believed to be the last original poem which he composed at Weston.

It would have been well for her and for him if mere bodily weakness had been the worst that befel Mrs.

Unwin in the evening of her days ; but unhappily with the decay of her faculties her character underwent a great change, and she who for years had found all her happiness in ministering to her afflicted friend, and seemed to have no thought but for his welfare, now became querulous and exacting, forgetful of him and mindful apparently only of herself. Unable to move out of her chair without help, or to walk across the room unless supported by two people, her speech at times almost unintelligible, she deprived him of all his wonted exercises, both bodily and mental, as she did not choose that he should leave her for a moment, or ever use a pen or a book except when he read to her. To these demands he responded with all the devotion of gratitude and affection ; he was assiduous in his attentions to her, but the strain told heavily on his strength.

It is no wonder that in these melancholy circumstances the oppression of spirits under which he had laboured for so many years should grow ever heavier. In one of his letters he mentions that he suffered from a dejection such as he had never known since he commenced author, except when he was absolutely laid by. In another he speaks of rising in the morning "like an infernal frog out of Acheron, covered with the ooze and mud of melancholy" ; in another, he says that he seems to himself to be scrambling always in the dark, among rocks and precipices, without a guide, but with an enemy ever at his heels, ready to push him headlong. Above all, his religious delusion rose to a pitch of horror which threatened to overcast his whole mental horizon, and to extinguish the last glimmerings of reason and hope. He was haunted with forebodings of some overwhelming evil : his imagination was terrified by an endless train of horrible phantoms : he suffered agonies of despair. His



dreams were frightful. One night, for instance, he seemed to be taking a final leave of his dwelling and of every thing with which he had been most familiar, on the evening before his execution. He felt the tenderest regret at the separation, and looked about for something durable to carry with him as a memorial. The iron hasp of the garden door presenting itself, he was on the point of taking that ; but recollecting that the heat of the fire in which he was going to be tormented would fuse the metal, and that it would therefore only serve to increase his insupportable misery, he left it, and awoke in all the horror with which the reality of the visionary terrors could have filled him. With such extremities of torture could a gloomy religious creed rack the mind of one of the best and most innocent men who ever dignified and beautified our earth by their presence.

No doubt the mental decay of Mrs. Unwin was one of the causes which contributed most powerfully to plunge Cowper into this abysm of misery. It was not merely that he was doomed daily and hourly to witness sufferings which wrung his heart and which he was powerless to relieve, but that he no longer received from her those pious consolations which her milder faith and her old unshaken trust in the divine goodness had enabled her to minister to him in his darkest hours. Thus deprived of spiritual guidance at home, he looked for it abroad, and unhappily he found it in Samuel Teedon, the pious, ignorant, foolish, self-sufficient schoolmaster of Olney, whose clumsy compliments, clownish manners, dull conversation, and ridiculous accounts of his petty ailments Cowper in his happier days had not failed to make the theme of delicate banter. This awkward booby, this presumptuous ass, whose piety, if it was sincere, was perhaps not wholly disinterested, since he received

through Cowper's agency a regular allowance in money, which he liberally repaid in prayer, was now consulted by the poet and Mrs. Unwin as a sort of divine oracle. When Cowper had had a particularly bad dream, or on waking in the morning imagined he heard voices speaking to him, he enquired of the Lord by the mouth of Samuel Teedon as to what these things might mean, and in due time received gracious and reassuring answers. When he hesitated about going on with the edition of Milton, which failed so miserably, the case was laid before the schoolmaster, who, after spreading it out as usual on the mercy-seat, announced that the Lord encouraged him to proceed "by shining on his addresses, and quickening him by his word." The letters which Cowper wrote to this poor driveller are melancholy witnesses to the wreck of a fine intellect; and in reading them we cannot but wish that when he sought the Lord at the schoolhouse of Olney, a voice had answered him as Colonel White answered Barebones's Parliament when they told him that they were seeking the Lord: "Then you may go elsewhere, for to my certain knowledge, He has not been here these many years."

So things went from bad to worse at Weston. To add to all their other troubles pecuniary anxieties were creeping in on them. Neither of the two friends was now able to take charge of their domestic affairs, and though Mrs. Unwin persisted in keeping the purse-strings in her poor feeble hands, there was no proper check on the household expenditure. Unworthy objects of their bounty took advantage of their weakness. All went to wrack and ruin.

Yet some temporary alleviation of their sorrows was afforded; a last gleam of sunset light shone on the sad household at Weston, with the visit of friends in the

autumn of 1793. Mr. Rose arrived early in October, bringing with him the painter, Lawrence, to whom Cowper sat for his portrait. Mr. Rose had been commissioned by Lord Spencer to invite Cowper and his guests to his seat of Althorpe in Northamptonshire, where the historian, Gibbon, was about to pay a long visit. The invitation was attractive, and all Cowper's guests urged him to go; but the constitutional shyness of the poet conspired with the infirm state of Mrs. Unwin's health to prevent him from meeting his famous contemporary. He sent a polite refusal through Mr. Rose. A few days after Mr. Rose's arrival, Johnny of Norfolk, now the Reverend John Johnson, joined the party at Weston, and early in November Hayley came on his second visit. He found Cowper apparently well and enlivened by the society of his two favourite friends, Johnson and Rose. The poet still possessed completely all the admirable faculties of his mind and all the native tenderness of his heart; yet there was something indescribable in his appearance which alarmed Hayley with apprehensions of coming evil. During his visit the two authors kept each other busy, Cowper revising Hayley's *Life of Milton*, and Hayley doing the same for his friend's Homer, while Mrs. Unwin sat in her corner by the fire, sometimes silent, listening to the patter of the rain on the windows, sometimes laughing at the two friends, or interrupting them with a question or a remark, sometimes, when no heed was paid to her, holding a conversation with herself.

When Hayley had gone after a fortnight's visit, Lady Hesketh arrived about the middle of November. Knowing the terrible change which had taken place in Mrs. Unwin, and how severely it must have affected Cowper, she found him better than she expected. But the blow which the watchful Hayley had apprehended fell on the

poet in the second week of January 1794 and broke him finally. His spirits wholly deserted him. He ceased to work and to correspond with his friends. For six days he sat "still and silent as death," and took no other food during that time than a morsel of bread dipped in wine and water. When every other remedy had failed, the medical attendant suggested that, as the only remaining chance, Mrs. Unwin should invite him to go out with her.<sup>2</sup> She was induced, not without the exercise of tact and management, to make the experiment, and observing that it was a fine morning, said she should like to try to walk. Cowper at once rose, took her by the arm, and the spell which had bound him to his chair was broken.

Yet though he lived, no improvement took place in his mental condition. The arrival of Hayley in the spring, who came at much personal inconvenience to attend to his unhappy friend, seemed to give no pleasure to the sufferer ; he testified not the least glimmering of satisfaction at the appearance of a guest whom he used to receive with the most lively expressions of affectionate delight. During Hayley's stay a letter came from Lord Spencer announcing that it was His Majesty's intention to grant Cowper a pension of three hundred pounds a year for the residue of his life. But the news came too late to bring him the smallest comfort.<sup>1</sup> As time went on, in spite of the unremitting attentions of Lady Hesketh, who stayed at Weston and devoted herself to the care of the two suffering friends, Cowper grew rather worse than better. He hardly ate, he was worn to a shadow, he did nothing but pace incessantly up and down in his study or his bedroom ; he lived in a constant state of terror dreadful to behold,

<sup>1</sup> The official document recording the grant is now exhibited in Cowper's house at Olney. It is signed by George the Third and Pitt. The pension was to date from July 5, 1794.



expecting daily and even hourly to be carried off by the Devil. This lasted for about eighteen months from the spring of 1794 till the latter end of July 1795. Then the Rev. John Johnson came to Weston from Norfolk, and with affectionate solicitude and tact persuaded the two invalids to accompany him on a visit to Norfolk, in the hope that a complete change of scene might be beneficial to both. Cowper was reluctant to leave the beautiful and peaceful Weston, to which, in spite of all he had suffered there, his heart clung with constant affection. He had a presentiment, which proved true, that he should see it no more; and on a panel of the window shutter in his bedroom—the bedroom overlooking the quiet garden where he had so often walked with Mrs. Unwin—he wrote in pencil the sad lines :

*“ Farewell, dear scenes, for ever closed to me ;  
Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye ! ”*<sup>1</sup>

From Weston the party drove through Bedford without stopping, and spent the first night of the journey at the quiet little country town of St. Neot's. There in the moonlight Cowper walked up and down with his kinsman in the churchyard, conversing composedly and almost cheerfully on the subject of Thomson's *Seasons* ; and there, with the moonlight sleeping on its calm water, he saw for the last time his beloved Ouse.

In August, thinking that the invalids might benefit by sea air, Mr. Johnson took them to the village of Mundsley on the Norfolk coast. The cliffs there are high, the sands firm and level, and pacing on them the poet, if he could not recover his lost peace of mind, seemed to be soothed

<sup>1</sup> The panel has been removed from the house at Weston and is now exhibited at the poet's house at Olney. The inscription is blurred but still legible.

by the monotonous sound of the breakers. But his heart went back to Weston, and in the few letters written by him from Mundsley, he speaks of the dear village with fond regret. After various changes of abode the invalids finally settled with Mr. Johnson at his house in East Dereham. There, a few months after their settlement, Mrs. Unwin died on the seventeenth of September 1796, in her seventy-second year. Cowper was too sunk in melancholy even to take notice of her last illness ; yet he must have been aware of it, for on the morning of her death, when the servant opened his window, he asked her, "Sally, is there life above stairs?" He went to her bedside as usual after breakfast that morning, then he returned to the room below and requested Mr. Johnson to read to him Miss Burney's novel *Camilla*. The reading was soon interrupted, and Mr. Johnson was beckoned out of the room to learn that all was over. The news affected Cowper so little, that after hearing it he allowed his kinsman to resume the reading of the novel. But when they led him into the chamber of death, and he saw her lying on the bed, for ever still, he gave way to a burst of emotion. Then he quitted the room and never spoke of her again. They buried her in Dereham churchyard at night by torchlight, lest the sight and sounds of the last sad procession should agitate him unduly.

He lingered for a few years more, always plunged in the deepest, the most hopeless melancholy. Yet he allowed them to read to him, and he listened to his own poems in silence ; only he forbade them to read to him *John Gilpin*. He was even induced to resume his long interrupted revision of Homer, and he seemed calmer while he was engaged in the old familiar task ; his very breathing was observed to be longer and easier while he sat with bowed head over his desk. Having once begun, he

worked steadily, and completed the revision on the eighth of March 1799. A few days later he wrote his last original poem, *The Castaway*, founded on an incident in Anson's *Voyages* which he had read long before. His work was now done, and the hour of rest was not far off. At the end of January 1800, symptoms of dropsy appeared in his feet and ankles, and gradually increased. By the end of February he ceased to come down stairs; by the end of March he was confined to his bedroom. When a doctor asked him how he felt, he answered, "I feel unutterable despair." The night before he died, being very weak, they offered him a cordial, but he rejected it, saying, "What can it signify?" They were his last words. Next morning, Friday, the twenty-fifth day of April, 1800, there was death on his face, but he survived till five o'clock in the afternoon, when his long sufferings and sorrows quietly ceased. All that is mortal of him rests in Dereham church, not far from the dust of Mary Unwin. Over his grave Lady Hesketh caused a monument to be erected, and Hayley composed for it a copy of verses containing a tribute to his departed friend, a tribute which all who know and love Cowper will acknowledge to be just :

*"Ye, who with warmth the public triumph feel  
Of talents dignified by sacred zeal,  
Here, to devotion's bard devoutly just,  
Pay your fond tribute due to Cowper's dust!  
England, exulting in his spotless fame,  
Ranks with her dearest sons his favourite name.  
Sense, fancy, wit, suffice not all to raise  
So clear a title to affection's praise:  
His highest honours to the heart belong;  
His virtues form'd the magic of his song."*





# LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

LETTERS FROM LONDON

1762—1763

## I

*To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq., at Tendring Hall,  
near Ipswich.*

DEAR ROWLEY,

Your letter has taken me just in the crisis ; to-morrow I set off for Brighthelmston,<sup>1</sup> and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill ; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetick as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour ; but my resolution is, (and I would advise you to adopt it,) never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be ; but in the mean time *Io Triumphe!* If

<sup>1</sup> Brighton.

a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one ; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic ; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances ; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by any thing but his natural temper ? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are directed by others ! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly ; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps,

as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it ; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company ; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it : but here it is, such as it is, and much good may you do with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu ! Carr is well, and gives his love to you.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

*Sept. 2, 1762.*

## II

### *To Lady Hesketh.*

THE TEMPLE, *Aug. 9, 1763.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals,<sup>1</sup> and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very

<sup>1</sup> Of the House of Lords, of which at this time Cowper had a prospect of being appointed clerk.

agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution,—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his country. O! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this,—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity! I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My



character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me ; and, between friends, it is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin ! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.—Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

## LETTERS FROM HUNTINGDON

1765-1767

### III

*To Joseph Hill, Esq., Cook's Court, Carey  
Street, London.*

HUNTINGDON, *June 24, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,

The only recompense I can make you for your kind attention to my affairs during my illness, is to tell you, that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure ; and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

I left St. Alban's on the seventeenth, and arrived that day at Cambridge, spent some time there with my brother, and came hither on the twenty-second. I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions ; we have had many worse, and except the size of it, (which however is sufficient for a single man,) but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept

no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them ; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

The river Ouse, (I forget how they spell it,) is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world ; at this town it is I believe as wide as the Thames at Windsor ; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks, these being attributes which in strict truth belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning.

I beg you will remember me to all my friends, which is a task will cost you no great pains to execute : particularly remember me to those of your own house, and believe me, your very affectionate,

W. C.

#### IV

#### *To Lady Hesketh.*

HUNTINGDON, *July 1, 1765.*

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,

Since the visit you were so kind as to pay me in the Temple (the only time I ever saw you without

pleasure), what have I not suffered ! And since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not enjoyed ! You know, by experience, how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever ; but, Oh the fever of the brain ! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice : nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise : when I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I ever received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it, and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

I write thus to you that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature ; which you might be apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world ; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so : but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness which without it I should never have found ; and I know, and have experience of it every day, that the mercy of God, to him who believes himself the object of it, is more than sufficient to compensate for the loss of every other blessing.

You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no



need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built. What I have written would appear like enthusiasm to many, for we are apt to give that name to every warm affection of the mind in others which we have not experienced in ourselves ; but to you, who have so much to be thankful for, and a temper inclined to gratitude, it will not appear so.

I beg you will give my love to Sir Thomas, and believe that I am obliged to you both for inquiring after me, at St. Alban's.—Yours ever,  
W. C.

## V

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

HUNTINGDON, *July 3, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,

Whatever you may think of the matter, it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live upon sheeps' heads, and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower ; and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless encumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and ten-pence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washer-woman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have

been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. Then as to small beer, I am puzzled to pieces about it. I have bought as much for a shilling, as will serve us at least a month, and it is grown sour already. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before ; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.

I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered. This was from my woollen-draper ; a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponisible man, and extremely civil. He has a cold bath, and has promised me a key of it, which I shall probably make use of in the winter. He has undertaken, too, to get me the *St. James's Chronicle* three times a-week, and to show me Hinchinbrook House,<sup>1</sup> and to do every service for me in his power ; so that I did not exceed the truth, you see, when I spoke of his civility. Here is a card-assembly, and a dancing-assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions ; especially as I shall go to 'em, just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that ; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor ; and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places, I shall not come within the description of a spectator ;

<sup>1</sup> The old seat of the Cromwells at Huntingdon.

and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition.

You are an old dog at a bad tenant ; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad ! I leave him entirely to your mercy.

My dear Joe, you desire me to write long letters—I have neither matter enough, nor perseverance enough for the purpose. However, if you can but contrive to be tired of reading as soon as I am tired of writing, we shall find that short ones answer just as well ; and, in my opinion, this is a very practicable measure.

My friend Colman has had good fortune ; I wish him better fortune still ; which is, that he may make a right use of it. The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it is their own fault.

I was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If you can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour if you will pay him for me ; but do it at your leisure.—Yours and theirs,  
W. C.

## VI

*To Lady Hesketh.*HUNTINGDON, *Sept.* 14, 1765.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

The longer I live here, the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it. I am upon very good terms with no less than five families, besides two or three odd scrambling fellows like myself. The last acquaintance I made here is with the race of the Unwins, consisting of father and mother, son and daughter, the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age, one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life, when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen, and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the perusal even of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being and having always been sincere in his belief and love of the Gospel. Another acquaintance I have lately made is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North country divine, very poor, but very good, and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all

the year round ; and travels on foot to serve two churches every Sunday through the year, his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. —, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh ; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple (for he is very religious), and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a FOUNTAIN of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect time-piece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. —. He is very much a gentleman, well read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well.

You say, you hope it is not necessary for salvation, to undergo the same afflictions that I have undergone. No ! my dear cousin. God deals with his children as a merciful father ; he does not, as he himself tells us, afflict willingly the sons of men. Doubtless there are many, who, having been placed by his good providence



out of the reach of any great evil and the influence of bad example, have from their very infancy been partakers of the grace of his Holy Spirit, in such a manner as never to have allowed themselves in any grievous offence against him. May you love him more and more day by day ; as every day, while you think upon him, you will find him more worthy of your love : and may you be finally accepted with him for His sake, whose intercession for all his faithful servants cannot but prevail !—Yours ever,

W. C.

## VII

### *To Lady Hesketh.*

HUNTINGDON, Oct. 18, 1765.

I wish you joy, my dear cousin, of being safely arrived in port from the storms of Southampton. For my own part, who am but as a Thames wherry, in a world full of tempest and commotion, I know so well the value of the creek I have put into, and the snugness it affords me, that I have a sensible sympathy with you in the pleasure you find in being once more blown to Droxford. I know enough of Miss Morley to send her my compliments ; to which, if I had never seen her, her affection for you would sufficiently entitle her. If I neglected to do it sooner, it is only because I am naturally apt to neglect what I ought to do ; and if I was as genteel as I am negligent, I should be the most delightful creature in the universe.

I am glad you think so favourably of my Huntingdon acquaintance ; they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little ; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family ; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house I was introduced to the daughter alone ; and sat with her near half an hour, before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on : accordingly she talked a great deal, and extremely well ; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease of address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.

Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first

prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am ; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should ; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request before I left St. Alban's, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe, with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard even while we are making them ; and how delightful to meet with a proof of it in the effectual and actual grant of them ! Surely it is a gracious finishing <sup>given</sup> to those means, which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty, —a grace unlimited as undeserved ; and like its glorious Author, free in its course, and blessed in its operation !

My dear cousin ! health and happiness, and above all, the favour of our great and gracious Lord, attend

you ! While we seek it in spirit and in truth, we are infinitely more secure of it than of the next breath we expect to draw. Heaven and earth have their destined periods ; ten thousand worlds will vanish at the consummation of all things ; but the word of God standeth fast ; and they who trust in him shall never be confounded. My love to all who inquire after me.

—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

### VIII

*To Major Cowper, at the Park House,  
near Hartford.*

HUNTINGDON, Oct. 18, 1765.

MY DEAR MAJOR,

I have neither lost the use of my fingers nor my memory, though my unaccountable silence might incline you to suspect that I had lost both. The history of those things which have, from time to time, prevented my scribbling, would not only be insipid but extremely voluminous ; for which reasons they will not make their appearance at present, nor probably at any time hereafter. If my neglecting to write to you were a proof that I had never thought of you, and that had been really the case, five shillings a piece would have been much too little to give for the sight of such a monster ! but I am no such monster, nor do I perceive in myself the least tendency to such a transformation. You may recollect that I had but very uncomfortable expectations of the ac-

commodation I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it to take our lot, where it shall please Providence to cast it, without anxiety ! Had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became known to all the visitable people here, and do verily think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw.

Here are three families who have received me with the utmost civility ; and two in particular have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigrees and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men who suit my temper to a hair. The town is one of the neatest in England ; the country is fine, for several miles about it ; and the roads, which are all turnpike, and strike out four or five different ways, are perfectly good all the year round. I mention this latter circumstance chiefly because my distance from Cambridge has made a horseman of me at last, or at least is likely to do so. My brother and I meet every week, by an alternate reciprocation of intercourse, as Sam Johnson would express it ; sometimes I get a lift in a neighbour's chaise, but generally ride. As to my own personal condition, I am much happier than the day is long,



and sunshine and candlelight see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, as much company as I choose, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all. I beg you will give my love to my dear cousin Maria, and to every body at the Park. If Mrs. Maitland is with you, as I suspect by a passage in Lady Hesketh's letter to me, pray remember me to her very affectionately. —And believe me, my dear friend, ever yours.

## IX

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Oct. 25, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,

I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the *belle assemblée* at Southampton; high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge, which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially betaken myself to my books, and my fireside; and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I

ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have been always apt to do), we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most

amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Mr. Gray's stanza—

“ Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear ;  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

—Yours, dear Joe,

W. C.

X

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

Nov. 5, 1765.

DEAR JOE,

I wrote to you about ten days ago,

Soliciting a quick return of gold,  
To purchase certain horse that like me well.

Either my letter or your answer to it, I fear, has miscarried. The former, I hope ; because a miscarriage of the latter might be attended with bad consequences.

I find it impossible to proceed any longer in my present course, without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore entered into an agreement with the Rev. Mr. Unwin, to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I would wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of this matter till about five days ago : but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as

soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here.  
—Yours ever,

W. C.

I know nobody so like Mrs. Unwin as my Aunt Madan, I don't mean in person, for she is a much younger woman, but in character.

## XI

*To Mrs. Cowper, at the Park House,  
Hartford.*

HUNTINGDON, Oct. 20, 1766.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

I am very sorry for poor Charles's illness, and hope you will soon have cause to thank God for his complete recovery. We have an epidemical fever in this country likewise, which leaves behind it a continual sighing, almost to suffocation; not that I have seen any instance of it, for, blessed be God! our family have hitherto escaped it, but such was the account I heard of it this morning.

I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none; the place indeed swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have

acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs. Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren.



Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life ; above all, for a heart to like it.

I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders, and I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose ; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it ; indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the meantime, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and I hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman.—Yours ever,  
my dear cousin,

W. C.

## XII

*To Mrs. Cowper, at the Park House,  
Hartford.*

HUNTINGDON, *July 13, 1767.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin being flung from his horse, as he was going to the church on Sunday morning, received a dreadful

fracture on the back part of the skull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits which will not presently be worn off. He died in a poor cottage, to which he was carried immediately after his fall about a mile from home; and his body could not be brought to his house till the spirit was gone to Him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord cometh !

The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle, but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us, but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my Aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his enquiries. It is probable we shall stay here till Michaelmas.

W. C.

## LETTERS FROM OLNEY

1769-1786

### XIII

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

1769.

DEAR JOE,

Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, "How much one man differs from another!" This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation: but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man.

But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours ; I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your affectionate friend and servant,

W. C.

#### XIV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

Nov. 12, 1776.

DEAR FRIEND,

The very agreeable contents of your last came safe to hand in the shape of two notes for thirty pounds. I am to thank you likewise for a barrel of very good oysters, received about a fortnight ago. One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them ; butts, plaice, flounder, or any other. If herrings are yet to be had, as they cannot be bought at Olney till they are good for nothing, they will be welcome too. We have seen none this year, except a parcel that Mrs. Unwin sent for, and the fishmonger sent stale ones, a trick they are apt to play upon their customers at a distance.

Having suffered so much from nervous fevers myself I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.— Believe me, yours,

WM. COWPER.

XV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*April*—I fancy the 20th, 1777.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Thanks for a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone; a gentleman who relates his travels so agreeably, that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion. I have been reading Gray's *Works*, and think him the only poet since Shakspeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His



humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet, I think equally poignant with the Dean's.—I am, yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

XVI

*To the Rev. W. Unwin.*

*July 18, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I hurry you into the midst of things at once, which if it be not much in the epistolary style, is acknowledged however to be very sublime. Mr. Morley, videlicet the grocer, is guilty of much neglect and carelessness, and has lately so much disappointed your mother, that she is at last obliged to leave him, and begs you will send her Mr. Rawlinson's address, that she may transfer her custom to him. She adds, moreover, that she was well aware of the unseasonableness of salmon at this time, and did not mean that you should order any to Olney till the spring.

We are indebted to you for your political intelligence, but have it not in our power to pay you in kind. Proceed, however, to give us such information as cannot be learned from the newspaper; and when any thing arises at Olney, that is not in the threadbare style of daily occurrences, you shall hear of it in return. Nothing of this sort has happened lately, except that a lion was imported here at the fair, seventy years of age, and was as tame as a goose. Your

mother and I saw him embrace his keeper with his paws, and lick his face. Others saw him receive his head in his mouth, and restore it to him again unhurt ;—a sight we chose not to be favoured with, but rather advised the honest man to discontinue the practice,—a practice hardly reconcileable to prudence, unless he had a head to spare. The beast, however, was a very magnificent one, and much more royal in his appearance than those I have seen in the Tower.

The paper tells us that the Chancellor is frequently at the Register Office, having conceived a design to shorten the proceedings in his court. If he has indeed such a purpose in view, he is so industrious and so resolute, that he will never let it drop unaccomplished. Perhaps the practitioners will have no reason to regret it, as they may gain in such an event, more by the multiplicity of suits, than they do at present by the length of them.

Your mother joins me in affectionate respects—I should have said in love, to yourself, Mrs. Unwin, Miss Shuttleworth, and little John. If you will accept this for a letter, perhaps I may be able to furnish you with more such upon occasion.—Yours, with thanks for your last,

WM. COWPER.

## XVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*May 26, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I must beg your assistance in a design I have formed to cheat the glazier. Government has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will enquire at a glass-manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address, I will execute the rest of the business myself, without giving you any farther trouble.

I am obliged to you for the Poets; and though I little thought that I was translating so much money out of your pocket into the bookseller's, when I turned Prior's poem into Latin, yet I must needs say that, if you think it worth while to purchase the English Classics at all, you cannot possess yourself of them upon better terms. I have looked into some of the volumes, but not having yet finished the *Register* have merely looked into them. A few things I have met with, which if they had been burned the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any; the English Muse would

have lost no credit by the omission of such trash. Some of them again seem to me to have but a very disputable right to a place among the Classics ; and I am quite at a loss, when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do.

Your mother sends her love and affectionate remembrance to all at Stock, from the tallest to the shortest there, in which she is accompanied by yours,

WM. COWPER.

## XVIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July — 79.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James Martin, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford, for half the money.

When I was at Margate, it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stonework, and such I found it. By this time, I suppose, it is finished ; and surely it is no small advantage, that you have an opportunity of observing how nicely those great stones are put together, as often as you please, without either trouble or expense. But you think Margate more lively. So is a Cheshire cheese full of

mites more lively than a sound one; but that very liveliness only proves its rottenness. I remember, too, that Margate, though full of company, was generally filled with such company, as people who were nice in the choice of their company, were rather fearful of keeping company with. The hoy went to London every week, loaded with mackerel and herrings, and returned loaded with company.<sup>1</sup> The cheapness of the conveyance made it equally commodious for Dead fish and Lively company. So, perhaps, your solitude at Ramsgate may turn out another advantage; at least I should think it one.

There was not, at that time, much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country, and the fine prospects of the sea, which are no where surpassed except in the Isle of Wight, or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember, engaged my curiosity, and I went to see it:—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland, at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved by this fortunate incident. It is hardly possible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Lamb has a well-known essay on the old Margate hoy with its "weather-beaten, sun-burnt captain, and his rough accommodations—ill-exchanged for the foppery and fresh-water niceness of the modern steam-packet."



We heartily wish that Mrs. Unwin may receive the utmost benefit of bathing. At the same time we caution *you* against the use of it, however the heat of the weather may seem to recommend it. It is not safe for thin habits, hectically inclined.

I remember,—(the fourth and last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion,) that Sam Cox, the counsel, walking by the seaside as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, “I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce a *sprat*.” Our love attends your whole party.  
—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

P.S.—You are desired to purchase three pounds of sixpenny white worsted, at a shop well recommended for that commodity. The Isle of Thanet is famous for it, beyond any other place in the kingdom.

## XIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July 17, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines :

---

*Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hæmi  
Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ !*

The worst of it is, that though the sun-beams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon.

As you have ventured to make the experiment, your own experience will be your best guide in the article of bathing. An inference will hardly follow, though one should pull at it with all one's might, from Smollett's case to yours. He was corpulent, muscular, and strong; whereas, if you were either stolen or strayed, such a description of you in an advertisement would hardly direct an enquirer with sufficient accuracy and exactness. But if bathing does not make your head ache, or prevent your sleeping at night, I should imagine it could not hurt you.

I remember taking a walk upon the strand at Margate, where the cliff is high and perpendicular. At long intervals there are cart-ways, cut through the rock down to the beach, and there is no other way of access to it, or of return from it. I walked near a mile upon the water edge, without observing that the tide was rising fast upon me. When I *did* observe it, it was almost too late. I ran every step back again, and had much ado to save my distance. I mention this as a caution, lest you should happen at any time to be surprised as I was. It would be very unpleasant to be forced to cling, like a cat, to the side of a precipice, and perhaps hardly possible to do it, for four hours without any respite.

It seems a trifle, but it is a real disadvantage to have no better name to pass by than the gentleman you mention. Whether we suppose him settled and promoted in the army, the church, or the law, how uncouth the sound — Captain Twopenny! Bishop Twopenny! Judge Twopenny! The abilities of Lord Mansfield would hardly impart a dignity to such a name. Should he perform deeds worthy of poetical panegyric, how difficult would it be to ennoble the sound of Twopenny!

Muse! place him high upon the lists of Fame,  
The wonderous man, and Twopenny his name!

But to be serious, if the French should land in the Isle of Thanet, and Mr. Twopenny should fall into their hands, he will have a fair opportunity to frenchify his name, and may call himself Monsieur Deux Sous; which, when he comes to be exchanged by Cartel, will easily resume an English form, and slide naturally into Two Shoes, in my mind a considerable improvement.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

XX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Sept. 21, 1779.*

*AMICO MIO,*

Be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants; but I cannot mend the kitchen windows,

till by the help of that implement I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber I should be a complete glazier; and possibly the happy time may come, when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, "that he had found the Emilius who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea." I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place.

I have eight pair of tame pigeons. When I first enter the garden in a morning, I find them perched upon the wall, waiting for their breakfast; for I feed them always upon the gravel-walk. If your wish should be accomplished, and you should find yourself furnished with the wings of a dove, I shall undoubtedly find you amongst them. Only be so good, if that

should be the case, to announce yourself by some means or other. For I imagine your crop will require something better than tares to fill it.

Your mother and I last week made a trip in a post-chaise to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens, I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hot-house in the most flourishing state, and the orange trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice. Our love attends you all.—Yours,

W. C.

## XXI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Oct. 31, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say; in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.



I have been well entertained with Johnson's biography, for which I thank you: with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican; and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvass. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him; and it is well for Milton, that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing, and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon *Lycidas*, and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule, (what is indeed ridiculous enough,) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if *Lycidas* was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails

in it, go for nothing. I am convinced by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever any thing so delightful as the music of the *Paradise Lost*? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute. Variety without end and never equalled, unless perhaps by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thresh his old jacket, till I made his pension jingle in his pocket.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room; our love attends you.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

## XXII

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

Nov. 14, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your approbation of my last Heliconian present encourages me to send you another. I wrote it, indeed, on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sun-beams from their surface.

"On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow," &c.—  
Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

### XXIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Dec. 2, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

How quick is the succession of human events ! The cares of to-day are seldom the cares of to-morrow ; and when we lie down at night, we may safely say to most of our troubles—"Ye have done your worst, and we shall meet no more."

This observation was suggested to me by reading your last letter ; which though I have written since I received it, I have never answered. When that epistle passed under your pen, you were miserable about your tithes, and your imagination was hung round with pictures, that terrified you to such a degree, as made even the receipt of money burdensome. But it is all over now. You sent away your farmers in good humour, (for you can make people merry whenever you please,) and now you have nothing to do but to chink your purse, and laugh at what is past. Your delicacy makes you groan under that which other men never feel, or feel but slightly. A fly, that settles upon the tip of the nose, is troublesome ; and this is a comparison adequate to the most that mankind in general are sensible of, upon such tiny occasions. But the flies, that pester you, always get between your

eyelids, where the annoyance is almost insupportable.

I would follow your advice, and endeavour to furnish Lord North with a scheme of supplies for the ensuing year, if the difficulty I find in answering the call of my own emergencies did not make me despair of satisfying those of the nation. I can say but this ; if I had ten acres of land in the world, whereas I have not one, and in those ten acres should discover a gold mine, richer than all Mexico and Peru, when I had reserved a few ounces for my own annual supply, I would willingly give the rest to government. My ambition would be more gratified by annihilating the national incumbrances, than by going daily down to the bottom of a mine, to wallow in my own emolument. This is patriotism, you will allow ; but, alas, this virtue is for the most part in the hands of those who can do no good with it ! He that has but a single handful of it, catches so greedily at the first opportunity of growing rich, that his patriotism drops to the ground, and he grasps the gold instead of it. He that never meets with such an opportunity, holds it fast in his clenched fists, and says,—“Oh, how much good I would do, if I could !”

Your mother says—“Pray send my dear love.” There is hardly room to add mine but you will suppose it.—Yours,

W. C.

## XXIV

*To the Rev. W. Unwin.*

*Feb. 13, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The last of your mother's two reasons for not writing sooner, must serve as an apology for me. Uncertain when you would go to town, I chose to stay till that affair was decided. I am to thank you for your portraits taken from the life in the House of Commons, not forgetting the Chancellor, the Duke of Richmond, and the Bishops' wigs. Mr. Burke's mispronunciation of the word *vectigal*, brings to my remembrance a jocular altercation that passed when I was once in the gallery, between Mr. Rigby and the late Alderman Beckford. The latter was a very incorrect speaker, and the former, I imagine, not a very accurate scholar. He ventured, however, upon a quotation from Terence, and delivered it thus, *Sine Scelere et Baccho friget Venus*. The Alderman interrupted him, was very severe upon his mistake, and restored Ceres to her place in the sentence. Mr. Rigby replied that he was obliged to his worthy friend for teaching him Latin, and would take the first opportunity to return the favour by teaching him English.

You are not alone, I believe, in thinking that you see a striking resemblance between the reign of his present majesty and that of Charles the First. The undue extension of the influence of the crown; the



discountenancing and displacing of men obnoxious to the court, though otherwise men of unexceptionable conduct and character; the waste of the public money, and especially the suspicion that obtains of a fixed design in government to favour the cause of Popery, are features common to both faces. Again these causes have begun to produce the same effects now as they did in the reign of that unhappy monarch. It is long since I saw Lord Clarendon's account of it, but unless my memory fails me much, I think you will find, (and, indeed, it could hardly be otherwise,) that the leaders of the discontented party, and the several counties in their interest, had a good understanding with each other, and devised means for the communication of intelligence much like our modern committees of correspondence. You ask my opinion of the tendency of such associations. No, I mistake; you do not ask mine, but you give your own, which is exactly according to my own sentiments. Indeed they are explicit enough, and if one was inclined to suppose their intentions peaceable, they have taken care that the supposition shall be groundless. A year ago they expressed their wishes that the people would rise, and their astonishment that they did not. Now, they tell government plainly that the spirit of resistance is gone forth, that the nation is at last roused, that they will fly to arms upon the next provocation, and bid them slight the Yorkshire petition at their peril. Sir George Saville's speech reminded me of that line in which is described the opening of the Temple of

Janus, a ceremony that obtained as the established prelude to a war ;

*Discordia tetra  
Belli ferratos postes, portusque refregit.*

It seems clear, then, that hostilities are intended as the last resource. As to the time they choose for the purpose, it is, in my mind, the worst they could have chosen. So many gentlemen of the first rank and property in the kingdom, resolutely bent upon their purpose, their design professedly so laudable, and their means of compassing it so formidable, would command attention at any time. A quarrel of this kind, even if it proceeded to the last extremity, might possibly be settled without the ruin of the country, while there was peace with the neighbouring kingdoms ; but while there is war abroad, such an extensive war as the present, I fear it cannot.

I add to what your mother says about Indian ink, —a few brushes, and a pencil or two, with any thing else that may be considered convenient for the use of a beginner, as far as five shillings. I do not think my talent in the art worth more. She desires me to remind you of your promised vote and interest for a place in Christ's Hospital, of which, she understands, you are now a governor ;—and the parcel may come by the waggon, which it will do if it is sent on a Wednesday to the Windmill in St. John Street.

## XXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Feb. 27, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As you are pleased to desire my letters, I am the more pleased with writing them ; though at the same time I must needs testify my surprise that you should think them worth receiving, as I seldom send one that I think favourably of myself. This is not to be understood as an imputation upon your taste or judgment, but as an encomium upon my own modesty and humility, which I desire you to remark well. It is a just observation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that though men of ordinary talents may be highly satisfied with their own productions, men of true genius never are. Whatever be their subject, they always seem to themselves to fall short of it, even when they seem to others most to excel. And for this reason,—because they have a certain sublime sense of perfection, which other men are strangers to, and which they themselves in their performances are not able to exemplify. Your servant, Sir Joshua ! I little thought of seeing you when I began ; but as you have popped in you are welcome.

When I wrote last, I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses entitled the Modern Patriot, but was not quite pleased with a line or two, which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and

was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and with the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well-deserved satire in the morning, in the evening becomes a libel; the author commences his own judge, and while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers. Alas! what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet; I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking wit has produced the following, the subject of which is more important than the manner in which I have treated it seems to imply, but a fable may speak truth, and all truth is sterling; I only premise, that in a philosophical tract in the *Register*, I found it asserted that the glowworm is the nightingale's food.<sup>1</sup>

Have you heard? who has not? for a recommendatory advertisement of it is already published;—that

<sup>1</sup> This letter contained the fable of the Nightingale and Glowworm.—R. SOUTHEY.

a certain kinsman of your humble servant's has written a tract, now in the press, to prove polygamy a divine institution!<sup>1</sup> A plurality of wives is intended, but not of husbands. The end proposed by the author is to remedy the prevailing practice of seduction, by making the female delinquent *ipso facto* the lawful wife of the male. An officer of a regiment, part of which is quartered here, gave one of the soldiers leave to be drunk six weeks, in hopes of curing him by satiety:—he *was* drunk six weeks, and is so still, as often as he can find an opportunity. One vice may swallow up another, but no coroner in the state of Ethics ever brought in his verdict, when a vice died, that it was—*felo de se*.

They who value the man are sorry for his book : the rest say,

*Solvuntur risu tabulæ, tu missus abibis.*

Thanks for all you have done, and all you intend ; the biography will be particularly welcome.—Yours,  
W. C.

## XXVI

*To Mrs. Newton.*

*March 4, 1780.*

DEAR MADAM,

To communicate surprise is almost, perhaps quite, as agreeable as to receive it. This is my present motive

<sup>1</sup> The work referred to is *Thelyphthora*, by the Rev. Martin Madan, a cousin of the poet. In his correspondence Cowper often recurred to the topic.



for writing to you rather than to Mr. Newton. He would be pleased with hearing from me, but he would not be surprised at it ; you see, therefore, I am selfish upon the present occasion, and principally consult my own gratification. Indeed, if I consulted yours, I should be silent, for I have no such budget as the minister's furnished and stuffed with ways and means for every emergency, and shall find it difficult, perhaps, to raise supplies even for a short epistle.

You have observed in common conversation, that the man who coughs and blows his nose the oftenest, (I mean if he has not a cold,) does it because he has nothing to say. Even so it is in letter-writing : a long preface, such as mine, is an ugly symptom, and always forebodes great sterility in the following pages.

The vicarage-house became a melancholy object, as soon as Mr. Newton had left it ; when you left it, it become more melancholy : now it is actually occupied by another family, even I cannot look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening, I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, that used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there ; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place ; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do ; and when Mr. Page goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These

reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion, and though in many respects I have no more sensibility left than there is in brick and mortar, yet I am not permitted to be quite unfeeling upon this subject. If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of; they fear they shall find themselves great sufferers by the alteration that has taken place; they would have had reason to fear it in any case. But Mr. Newton's successor does not bring with him the happiest presages, so that in the present state of things they have double reason for their fears. Though I can never be the better for Mr. Page, Mr. Page shall never be the worse for me. If his conduct should even justify the worst apprehensions that have been formed of his character, it is no personal concern of mine. But this I can venture to say, that if he is not spotless, his spots will be seen, and the plainer, because he comes after Mr. Newton.

We were concerned at your account of Robert, and have little doubt but he will shuffle himself out of his

place. Where he will find another, is a question not to be resolved by those who recommended him to this. I wrote him a long letter, a day or two after the receipt of yours, but I am afraid it was only clapping a blister upon the crown of a wig-block.

My respects attend Mr. Newton and yourself, accompanied with much affection for you both.—Yours,  
dear Madam,

W. C.

## XXVII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 18, 1780.*

I am obliged to you for the communication of your correspondence with ——. It was impossible for any man, of any temper whatever, and however wedded to his own purpose, to resent so gentle and friendly an exhortation as you sent him. Men of lively imaginations are not often remarkable for solidity of judgement. They have generally strong passions to bias it, and are led far away from their proper road, in pursuit of pretty phantoms of their own creating. No law ever did or can effect what he has ascribed to that of Moses ; it is reserved for Mercy to subdue the corrupt inclinations of mankind, which threatenings and penalties, through the depravity of the heart, have always had a tendency rather to inflame.

The love of power seems as natural to kings, as the desire of liberty is to their subjects ; the excess of either is vicious, and tends to the ruin of both.

There are many, I believe, who wish the present corrupt state of things dissolved, in hope that the pure primitive constitution will spring up from the ruins. But it is not for man by himself man, to bring order out of confusion ; the progress from one to the other is not natural, much less necessary, and without the intervention of divine aid, impossible ; and they who are for making the hazardous experiment, would certainly find themselves disappointed. — Affectionately yours,

W. C.

## XXVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

OLNEY, April 16, 1780.

Since I wrote my last we have had a visit from —. I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance, from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman ; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise,

they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it ; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs ; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears, during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. — could have killed them both in another hour.

W. C.

## XXIX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*May 3, 1780.*

DEAR SIR,

You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment, that I have no excuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you, for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe that I am the only man alive, from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste ; but my leaf gold is tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me, that you will read my letters. I am not fond of longwinded metaphors ; I have



always observed, that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so do mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by poets, and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise, and my praise put together, are fame enough for me. O! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antarctic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth,—what are the planets,—what is the sun itself but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, “The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!” Their eyes have never been opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things

of consequence ; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing ; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back, and walk away with ; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself—"This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present ; I must leave it soon."

W. C.

### XXX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

May 8, 1780.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

My scribbling humour has of late been entirely absorbed in the passion for landscape drawing. It is a most amusing art, and like every other art, requires much practice and attention.

*Nil sine multo  
Vita labore dedit mortalibus.*

Excellence is providentially placed beyond the reach of indolence, that success may be the reward of industry, and that idleness may be punished with obscurity and disgrace. So long as I am pleased with an employment, I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind. I never received a *little* pleasure from any thing in

my life ; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this temperature is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue. Hence I draw an unfavourable prognostic, and expect that I shall shortly be constrained to look out for something else. Then perhaps I may string the lyre again, and be able to comply with your demand.

Now for the visit you propose to pay us, and propose *not* to pay us ; the hope of which plays about upon your paper, like a jack-o-lantern upon the ceiling. This is no mean simile, for Virgil (you remember) uses it. It is here, it is there, it vanishes, it returns, it dazzles you, a cloud interposes, and it is gone. However just the comparison, I hope you will contrive to spoil it, and that your final determination will be to come. As to the masons you expect, bring them with you ;—bring brick, bring mortar, bring every thing that would oppose itself to your journey ;—all shall be welcome. I have a greenhouse that is too small, come and enlarge it ; build me a pinery ; repair the garden wall, that has great need of your assistance ; do any thing ; you cannot do too much ; so far from thinking you and your train troublesome, we shall rejoice to see you, upon these or upon any other terms you can propose. But to be serious,—you will do well to

consider that a long summer is before you ; that the party will not have such another opportunity to meet this great while ; that you may finish your masonry long enough before winter, though you should not begin this month, but that you cannot always find your brother and sister Powley at Olney. These, and some other considerations, such as the desire we have to see you, and the pleasure we expect from seeing you all together, may, and, I think, ought to overcome your scruples.

From a general recollection of Lord Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, I thought (and I remember I told you so) that there was a striking resemblance between that period and the present. But I am now reading, and have read three volumes of Hume's *History*, one of which is engrossed entirely by that subject. There I see reason to alter my opinion, and the seeming resemblance has disappeared upon a more particular information. Charles succeeded to a long train of arbitrary princes, whose subjects had tamely acquiesced in the despotism of their masters, till their privileges were all forgot. He did but tread in their steps, and exemplify the principles in which he had been brought up, when he oppressed his people. But just at that time, unhappily for the monarch, the subject began to see, and to see that he had a right to property and freedom. This marks a sufficient difference between the disputes of that day and the present. But there was another main cause of that rebellion, which at this time does not operate

at all. The king was devoted to the hierarchy ; his subjects were puritans and would not bear it. Every circumstance of ecclesiastical order and discipline was an abomination to them, and in his esteem an indispensable duty. And though at last he was obliged to give up many things, he would not abolish episcopacy ; and till that were done his concessions could have no conciliating effect. These two concurring causes were indeed sufficient to set three kingdoms in a flame. But they subsist not now, nor any other, I hope, notwithstanding the bustle made by the patriots, equal to the production of such terrible events.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

XXXI

*To Mrs. Cowper.*

*May 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

I do not write to comfort you ; that office is not likely to be well performed by one who has no comfort for himself ; nor to comply with an impertinent ceremony, which in general might well be spared upon such occasions ; but because I would not seem indifferent to the concerns of those I have so much reason to esteem and love. If I did not sorrow for your brother's death, I should expect that nobody would for mine ; when I knew him, he was much beloved, and I doubt not continued to be so. To



live and die together is the lot of a few happy families, who hardly know what a separation means, and one sepulchre serves them all; but the ashes of our kindred are dispersed indeed. Whether the American gulf has swallowed up any other of my relations, I know not; it has made many mourners.

Believe me, my dear cousin, though after a long silence, which perhaps nothing less than the present concern could have prevailed with me to interrupt, as much as ever, your affectionate kinsman,

W. C.

### XXXII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*May 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If authors could have lived to adjust and authenticate their own text, a commentator would have been an useless creature. For instance—if Dr. Bentley had found, or opined that he had found, the word *tube*, where it seemed to present itself to you, and had judged the subject worthy of his critical acumen, he would either have justified the corrupt reading, or have substituted some invention of his own, in defence of which he would have exerted all his polemical abilities, and have quarrelled with half the literati in Europe. Then suppose the writer himself, as in the present case, to interpose with a gentle whisper thus—“If you look again, Doctor, you will perceive that

what appears to you to be *tube*, is neither more nor less than the simple monosyllable *ink*, but I wrote it in great haste, and the want of sufficient precision in the character has occasioned your mistake: *you* will be especially satisfied when you see the sense elucidated by the explanation."—But I question whether the doctor would quit his ground, or allow any author to be a competent judge in his own case. The world, however, would acquiesce immediately, and vote the critic useless.

James Andrews, who is my Michael Angelo, pays me many compliments on my success in the art of drawing, but I have not yet the vanity to think myself qualified to furnish your apartment. If I should ever attain to the degree of self-opinion requisite to such an undertaking, I shall labour at it with pleasure. I can only say, though I hope not with the affected modesty of the above-mentioned Dr. Bentley, who said the same thing,

*Me quoque dicunt  
Vatem pastores. Sed non Ego credulus illis.*

A crow, rook, or raven, has built a nest in one of the young elm trees, at the side of Mrs. Aspray's orchard. In the violent storm that blew yesterday morning, I saw it agitated to a degree that seemed to threaten its immediate destruction, and versified the following thoughts upon the occasion.<sup>1</sup>

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's Fable of the Raven concluded this letter.—R. SOUTHEY.

## XXXIII

*To Mrs. Newton.**June, 1780.*

DEAR MADAM,

When I write to Mr. Newton, he answers me by letter; when I write to you, you answer me in fish. I return you many thanks for the mackerel and lobster. They assured me in terms as intelligible as pen and ink could have spoken, that you still remember *Orchardside*; and though they never spoke in their lives, and it was still less to be expected from them that they should speak, being dead, they gave us an assurance of your affection that corresponds exactly with that which Mr. Newton expresses towards us in all his letters.—For my own part, I never in my life began a letter more at a venture than the present. It is possible that I may finish it, but perhaps more than probable that I shall not. I have had several indifferent nights, and the wind is easterly; two circumstances so unfavourable to me in all my occupations, but especially that of writing, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could even bring myself to attempt it.

You have never yet perhaps been made acquainted with the unfortunate Tom Freeman's misadventure. He and his wife returning from Hanslip fair, were coming down Weston Lane; to wit, themselves, their horse, and their great wooden panniers, at ten o'clock at night. The horse having a lively imagination, and

very weak nerves, fancied he either saw or heard something, but has never been able to say what. A sudden fright will impart activity, and a momentary vigour, even to lameness itself. Accordingly, he started, and sprung from the middle of the road to the side of it, with such surprising alacrity, that he dismounted the gingerbread baker and his gingerbread wife in a moment. Not contented with this effort, nor thinking himself yet out of danger, he proceeded as fast as he could to a full gallop, rushed against the gate at the bottom of the lane, and opened it for himself, without perceiving that there was any gate there. Still he galloped, and with a velocity and momentum continually increasing, till he arrived in Olney. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when I heard the most uncommon and unaccountable noise that can be imagined. It was, in fact, occasioned by the clattering of tin patty-pans and a Dutch-oven against the sides of the panniers. Much gingerbread was picked up in the street, and Mr. Lucy's windows were broken all to pieces. Had this been all, it would have been a comedy, but we learned the next morning, that the poor woman's collar-bone was broken, and she has hardly been able to resume her occupation since.

What is added on the other side, if I could have persuaded myself to write sooner, would have reached you sooner; 'tis about ten days old.<sup>1</sup> . . . . .

“The Doves.”

<sup>1</sup> Here followed Cowper's poem, *The Doves*.

The male Dove was smoking a pipe, and the female Dove was sewing, while she delivered herself as above. This little circumstance may lead you perhaps to guess what pair I had in my eye.—Yours, dear Madam,

WM. COWPER.

#### XXXIV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*June 8, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is possible I might have indulged myself in the pleasure of writing to you, without waiting for a letter from you, but for a reason which you will not easily guess. Your mother communicated to me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining and clever, and so forth :—now you must know, I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then, I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend the eulogium you bestowed ;—if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter ;—where I joked once, I will joke five times, and for one sensible remark I will send him a dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a sentence was well turned, and



every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing, therefore, to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only.

You are better skilled in ecclesiastical law than I am. Mrs. Powley desires me to inform her, whether a parson can be obliged to take an apprentice. For some of her husband's opposers at Dewsbury threaten to clap one upon him. Now I think it would be rather hard, if clergymen, who are not allowed to exercise any handicraft whatever, should be subject to such an imposition. If Mr. Powley was a cordwainer, or a breeches-maker, all the week, and a preacher only on Sundays, it would seem reasonable enough, in that case, that he should take an apprentice, if he chose it. But even then, in my poor judgement, he ought to be left to his option. If they mean by an apprentice, a pupil, whom they will oblige him to hew into a parson, and after chipping away the block that hides the minister within, to qualify him to stand erect in a pulpit,—that indeed is another consideration.—But still, we live in a free country, and I cannot bring myself even to suspect that an English divine can possibly be liable to such compulsion. Ask your uncle, however; for he is wiser in these things than either of us.

I thank you for your two inscriptions, and like the last the best; the thought is just and fine, but the two last lines are sadly damaged by the monkish jingle of *peperit* and *reperit*. I have not yet translated them, nor do I promise to do it, though at some idle hour perhaps I may. In return, I send you a translation of a simile in the *Paradise Lost*. Not having that poem at hand, I cannot refer you to the book and page, but you may hunt for it, if you think it worth your while. It begins—

“So when, from mountain tops, the dusky clouds  
Ascending,” &c.

*Quales aërii montis de vertice nubes  
Cum surgunt, et jam Boreæ tumida ora quærunt,  
Cælum hilares abdit, spissâ caligine, vultus :  
Tum si jucundo tandem sol prodeat ore,  
Et croceo montes et pascua lumine tingat,  
Gaudent omnia, aves mulcent concentibus agros,  
Balatuque ovium colles, vallesque resultant.*

If you spy any fault in my Latin, tell me, for I am sometimes in doubt; but, as I told you when you was here, I have not a Latin book in the world to consult, or correct a mistake by; and some years have passed since I was a schoolboy.

*An English Versification of a Thought that popped into my Head  
about two Months since.*

Sweet stream ! that winds through yonder glade—  
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid !—  
Silent, and chaste, she steals along,  
Far from the world's gay, busy throng ;  
With gentle, yet prevailing force,  
Intent upon her destin'd course :

Graceful, and useful, all she does,  
Blessing, and bless'd, where'er she goes :  
Pure-bosom'd, as that watery glass,  
And Heaven reflected in her face !

Now this is not so exclusively applicable to a maiden, as to be the sole property of your sister Shuttleworth. If you look at Mrs. Unwin, you will see that she has not lost her right to this just praise by marrying you.

Your mother sends her love to all, and mine comes jogging along by the side of it.—Yours, W. C.

### XXXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*June 22, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A word or two in answer to two or three questions of yours, which I have hitherto taken no notice of. I am not in a scribbling mood, and shall therefore make no excursions to amuse either myself or you. The needful will be as much as I can manage at present ; the playful must wait for another opportunity.

I thank you for your offer of Robertson ; but I have than reading upon my hands at this present writing more I shall get rid of in a twelvemonth :—and this moment recollect that I have seen it already. He is an author that I admire much, with one exception, that I think his style is too laboured. Hume, as an historian, pleases me more.

I have read just enough of the *Biographica Britannica*, to say, that I have tasted it, and have no doubt but I shall like it. I am pretty much in the garden at this season of the year, so read but little. In summer-time I am as giddy-headed as a boy, and can settle to nothing. Winter condenses me, and makes me lumpish and sober; and then I can read all day long.

For the same reasons, I have no need of the landscapes at present; when I want them I will renew my application, and repeat the description, but it will hardly be before October.

I congratulate you upon a duplicate of Ramsden's. As your charge is become twofold, may your satisfaction be so too. Mine is sure to be doubled, because you have promised me a present of salmon.

Before I arose this morning, I composed the three following stanzas; I send them because I like them pretty well myself; and if you should not, you must accept this handsome compliment as an amends for their deficiencies. You may print the lines, if you judge them worth it.<sup>1</sup>

I have only time to add love, etc., and my two initials.

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Verses on the burning of Lord Mansfield's library, etc.—  
R. SOUTHEY.

## XXXVI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*June 23, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your reflections upon the state of London, the sins and enormities of that great city, while you had a distant view of it from Greenwich, seem to have been prophetic of the heavy stroke that fell upon it just after.<sup>1</sup> Man often prophesies without knowing it ; a spirit speaks by him which is not his own, though he does not at that time suspect that he is under the influence of any other. Did he foresee what is always foreseen by Him who dictates what he supposes to be his own, he would suffer by anticipation, as well as by consequence ; and wish perhaps as ardently for the happy ignorance, to which he is at present so much indebted, as some have foolishly and inconsiderately done for a knowledge that would be but another name for misery.

And why have I said all this ? especially to you, who have hitherto said it to me :—not because I had the least desire of informing a wiser man than myself, but because the observation was naturally suggested

<sup>1</sup> The reference no doubt is to the riots headed by Lord George Gordon, which began on June 2, 1780, and lasted for several days. In his *Speech at Bristol previous to the Election*, delivered that year, Burke refers to the "desperate attempt, which would have consumed all the glory and power of this country in the flames of London ; and buried all law, order, and religion, under the ruins of the metropolis of the Protestant world." The riots are vividly described by Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*.



by the recollection of your letter, and that letter, though not the last, happened to be uppermost in my mind. I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more, than to a board that is under the carpenter's plane, (I mean while I am writing to you,) the shavings are my uppermost thoughts; after a few strokes of the tool, it acquires a new surface; this again, upon a repetition of his task, he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds: whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your acceptance, I know not; I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor of mahogany, but *Truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum*; consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last.

It is not strange that you should be the subject of a false report; for the sword of slander, like that of war, devours one as well as another; and a blameless character is particularly delicious to its unsparing appetite. But that you should be the object of such a report, you who meddle less with the designs of government than almost any man that lives under it, this is strange indeed. It is well, however, when they who account it good sport to traduce the reputation of another, invent a story that refutes itself. I wonder they do not always endeavour to accommodate their fiction to the real character of the person; their tale would then at least have an air of probability, and it might cost a peaceable good man much more trouble to disprove it. But perhaps it would not be easy to discern what part of your conduct lies more open to

such an attempt than another ; or what it is that you either say or do, at any time, that presents a fair opportunity to the most ingenious slanderer, to slip in a falsehood between your words, or actions, that shall seem to be of a piece with either. You hate compliment, I know ; but by your leave this is not one—it is a truth :—worse and worse ! now I have praised you indeed—well, you must thank yourself for it ; it was absolutely done without the least intention on my part, and proceeded from a pen that, as far as I can remember, was never guilty of flattery since I knew how to hold it. He that slanders me, paints me blacker than I am ; and he that flatters me, whiter—they both daub me ; and when I look in the glass of conscience, I see myself disguised by both : I had as lief my tailor should sew gingerbread-nuts on my coat instead of buttons, as that any man should call my Bristol stone a diamond. The tailor's trick would not at all embellish my suit, nor the flatterers make me at all the richer. I never make a present to my friend, of what I dislike myself. Ergo, (I have reached the conclusion at last,) I did not mean to flatter you.

We have sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth, by this post, praying him to interfere in parliament in behalf of the poor lace-makers. I say we, because I have signed it ; Mr. G. drew it up, Mr. — did not think it grammatical, therefore he would not sign it. Yet I think Priscian himself would have pardoned the manner for the sake of the matter. I dare say if his lordship does not comply with the prayer of it, it

will not be because he thinks it of more consequence to write grammatically, than that the poor should eat, but for some better reason. My love to all under your roof.—Yours,

W. C.

### XXXVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July 2, 1780.*

Carissime, I am glad of your confidence, and have reason to hope I shall never abuse it. If you trust me with a secret, I am hermetically sealed ; and if you call for the exercise of my judgement, such as it is, I am never freakish or wanton in the use of it, much less mischievous and malignant. Critics, I believe, do not often stand so clear of these vices as I do. I like your epitaph, except that I doubt the propriety of the word *immaturus* ; which, I think, is rather applicable to fruits than flowers ; and except the last pentameter, the assertion it contains being rather too obvious a thought to finish with : not that I think an epitaph should be pointed like an epigram. But still there is a closeness of thought and expression necessary in the conclusion of all these little things, that they may leave an agreeable flavour upon the palate. Whatever is short, should be nervous, masculine, and compact. Little men are so ; and little poems should be so ; because, where the work is short, the author has no right to the plea of weariness ; and laziness is

never admitted as an available excuse in any thing. Now you know my opinion, you will very likely improve upon my improvement, and alter my alterations for the better. To touch and retouch is, though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself; and if you would take as much pains as I do, you would have no need to ask for my corrections.

*Hic sepultus est*  
*Inter suorum lacrymas*  
 GULIELMUS NORTHCOT,  
 GULIELMI et MARIE filius  
*Unicus, unicè dilectus,*  
*Qui floris ritu succisus est semihiantis,*  
*Aprilis die septimo,*  
 1780, *Æt.* 10.

*Care, vale ! Sed non æternùm, care, valeto !*  
*Namque iterùm tecum, sim modò dignus ero :*  
*Tum nihil amplexus poterit divellere nostros,*  
*Nec tu marcesces, nec lacrymabor ego.*

Having an English translation of it by me, I send it, though it may be of no use.

Farewell ! “but not for ever,” Hope replies,  
 “Trace but his steps, and meet him in the skies !”  
 There nothing shall renew our parting pain,  
 Thou shalt not wither, nor I weep again !

The stanzas that I sent you are maiden ones, having never been seen by any eye but your mother’s and your own.

If you send me franks, I shall write longer letters—  
*Valete, sicut et nos valemus ! Amate, sicut et nos*  
*amamus.*

## XXXVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*July 12, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Such nights as I frequently spend, are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me, above all things, to the business of writing. Yet with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again.

We are both obliged to you for a sight of Mr. ——'s letter. The friendly and obliging manner of it will much enhance the difficulty of answering it. I think I can see plainly that though he does not hope for your applause, he would gladly escape your censure. He seems to approach you smoothly and softly, and to take you gently by the hand, as if he bespoke your lenity, and entreated you at least to spare him. You have such skill in the management of your pen, that I doubt not you will be able to send him a balmy reproof that shall give him no reason to complain of a



broken head.—How delusive is the wildest speculation when pursued with eagerness, and nourished with such arguments as the perverted ingenuity of such a mind as his can easily furnish!—Judgement falls asleep upon the bench, while Imagination, like a smug, pert counsellor, stands chattering at the bar, and with a deal of fine-spun, enchanting sophistry, carries all before him.

If I had strength of mind, I have not strength of body for the task which, you say, some would impose upon me. I cannot bear much thinking. The meshes of that fine network, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture.—No—I must needs refer it again to you.

My enigma will probably find you out, and you will find out my enigma at some future time. I am not in a humour to transcribe it now. Indeed I wonder that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants into laughter. But the mind long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its con-

temptations, though it were but a kitten playing with her tail.

You would believe, though I did not say it at the end of every letter, that we remember you and Mrs. Newton with the same affection as ever; but I would not therefore excuse myself from writing what it gives you pleasure to read. I have often wished indeed, when writing to an ordinary correspondent, for the revival of the Roman custom—*salutem* at top, and *vale* at bottom. But as the French have taught all Europe to enter a room and to leave it with a most ceremonious bow, so they have taught us to begin and conclude our letters in the same manner.—However I can say to you, *sans ceremonie*, Adieu, *mon ami*!

WM. COWPER.

### XXXIX

*To Mrs. Cowper, Park Street, Grosvenor Square.*

*July 20, 1780.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Mr. Newton having desired me to be of the party, I am come to meet him. You see me sixteen years older, at the least, than when I saw you last; but the effects of time seem to have taken place rather on the outside of my head than within it. What was brown is become gray, but what was foolish remains foolish still. Green fruit must rot before it ripens, if the season is such as to afford it nothing but cold winds

and dark clouds, that interrupt every ray of sunshine. My days steal away silently, and march on (as poor mad King Lear would have made his soldiers march) as if they were shod with felt; not so silently but that I hear them; yet were it not that I am always listening to their flight, having no infirmity that I had not when I was much younger, I should deceive myself with an imagination that I am still young.

I am fond of writing as an amusement, but do not always find it one. Being rather scantily furnished with subjects that are good for any thing, and corresponding only with those who have no relish for such as are good for nothing, I often find myself reduced to the necessity, the disagreeable necessity, of writing about myself. This does not mend the matter much; for though in a description of my own condition, I discover abundant materials to employ my pen upon, yet as the task is not very agreeable to *me*, so I am sufficiently aware that it is likely to prove irksome to others. A painter who should confine himself in the exercise of his art to the drawing of his own picture, must be a wonderful coxcomb, if he did not soon grow sick of his occupation; and be peculiarly fortunate, if he did not make others as sick as himself.

Remote as your dwelling is from the late scene of riot and confusion,<sup>1</sup> I hope that though you could not but hear the report, you heard no more, and that the roarings of the mad multitude did not reach you. That was a day of terror to the innocent, and the present

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 68, with the note.

is a day of still greater terror to the guilty. The law was for a few moments like an arrow in the quiver, seemed to be of no use, and did no execution ; now it is an arrow upon the string, and many, who despised it lately, are trembling as they stand before the point of it.

I have talked more already than I have formerly done in three visits :—you remember my taciturnity, never to be forgotten by those who knew me. Not to depart entirely from what might be, for aught I know, the most shining part of my character, I here shut my mouth, make my bow, and return to Olney.

W. C.

## XL

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July 27, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As two men sit silent, after having exhausted all their topics of conversation, one says—"It is very fine weather,"—and the other says—"Yes ;"—one blows his nose, and the other rubs his eyebrows ; (by the way, this is very much in Homer's manner,) such seems to be the case between you and me. After a silence of some days, I wrote you a long something, that (I suppose) was nothing to the purpose, because it has not afforded you materials for an answer. Nevertheless, as it often happens in the case above-stated, one of the distressed parties, being deeply sensible of the awkwardness of a dumb duet, breaks

silence again, and resolves to speak, though he has nothing to say. So it fares with me ; I am with you again in the form of an epistle, though considering my present emptiness, I have reason to fear that your only joy upon the occasion will be, that it is conveyed to you in a frank.

When I began, I expected no interruption. But if I had expected interruptions without end, I should have been less disappointed. First came the barber ; who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it. Then came Olney bridge,—not into the house, but into the conversation. The cause relating to it was tried on Tuesday at Buckingham. The judge directed the jury to find a verdict favourable to Olney. The jury consisted of one knave and eleven fools. The last-mentioned followed the afore-mentioned, as sheep follow a bell-wether, and decided in direct opposition to the said judge. Then a flaw was discovered in the indictment. The indictment was quashed, and an order made for a new trial. The new trial will be in the King's Bench, where said knave and said fools will have nothing to do with it. So the men of Olney fling up their caps, and assure themselves of a complete victory. A victory will save me and your mother many shillings, perhaps some pounds, which, except that it has afforded me a subject to write upon, was the only reason why I have said so much about it. I know you take an interest in all that concerns us, and will consequently rejoice with us in the prospect of an



event in which we are concerned so nearly.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

XLI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*July 30, 1780.*

MY DEAR SIR,

You may think perhaps that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin, in the way of poetical export than I do with you, and I believe you have reason: the truth is this;—If I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a Privy Counsellor, or a Chief Justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles, that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton; that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of an incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton. This has been one reason why I have so long delayed the riddle. But lest I should seem to set a value upon it, that I do not, by making it an object of still further inquiry, here it comes.

I am just two and two, I am warm, I am cold,  
And the parent of numbers that cannot be told ;  
I am lawful, unlawful—a duty, a fault ;  
I am often sold dear, good for nothing when bought,  
An extraordinary boon, and a matter of course,  
And yielded with pleasure—when taken by force.

W. C.

## XLII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*August 6, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You like to hear from me: this is a very good reason why I should write.—But I have nothing to say: this seems equally a good reason why I should not. Yet if you had alighted from your horse at our door this morning, and at this present writing, being five o'clock in the afternoon, had found occasion to say to me—"Mr. Cowper, you have not spoke since I came in; have you resolved never to speak again?" it would be but a poor reply, if in answer to the summons I should plead inability as my best and only excuse. And this by the way suggests to me a seasonable piece of instruction, and reminds me of what I am very apt to forget, when I have any epistolary business in hand, that a letter may be written upon any thing or nothing just as that any thing or nothing happens to occur. A man that has a journey before him twenty miles in length, which he is to perform on foot, will not hesitate and doubt whether he shall set out or not, because he does not

readily conceive how he shall ever reach the end of it: for he knows, that by the simple operation of moving one foot forward first, and then the other, he shall be sure to accomplish it. So it is in the present case, and so it is in every similar case. A letter is written as a conversation is maintained, or a journey performed; not by preconcerted or premeditated means, a new contrivance, or an invention never heard of before,—but merely by maintaining a progress, and resolving as a postilion does, having once set out, never to stop till we reach the appointed end. If a man may talk without thinking, why may he not write upon the same terms? A grave gentleman of the last century, a tie-wig, square-toe, Steinkirk figure, would say—"My good sir, a man has no right to do either." But it is to be hoped that the present century has nothing to do with the mouldy opinions of the last; and so good Sir Launcelot, or Sir Paul, or whatever be your name, step into your picture-frame again, and look as if you thought for another century, and leave us moderns in the mean time to think when we can, and to write whether we can or not, else we might as well be dead as you are.

When we look back upon our forefathers, we seem to look back upon the people of another nation, almost upon creatures of another species. Their vast rambling mansions, spacious halls, and painted case-ments, the gothic porch smothered with honeysuckles, their little gardens and high walls, their box-edgings, balls of holly, and yew-tree statues, are become so

entirely unfashionable now, that we can hardly believe it possible, that a people who resembled us so little in their taste, should resemble us in any thing else. But in every thing else, I suppose, they were our counterparts exactly ; and time, that has sewed up the slashed sleeve, and reduced the large trunk hose to a neat pair of silk stockings, has left human nature just where it found it. The inside of the man at least has undergone no change. His passions, appetites, and aims, are just what they ever were. They wear perhaps a handsomer disguise than they did in days of yore ; for philosophy and literature will have their effect upon the exterior ; but in every other respect a modern is only an ancient in a different dress.

W. C.

### XLIII

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Aug. 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixt pleasures of the country there. But it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well—you are honourably and usefully employed, and ten times more beneficially to society, than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual

practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well, to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession ; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found, when, lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the sea-side, you amused yourself with Tasso's *Jerusalem*, and the *Pastor Fido*. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey, when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the Bench. Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you who have no gout, and probably never will, when your hour of dismissal comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he.—I am, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—Mr. —— has not thought proper to favour me with his book, and having no interest in the subject, I have not thought proper to purchase it. Indeed I have no curiosity to read what I am sure must be erroneous before I read it. Truth is worth every thing that can be given for it ; but a mere display of ingenuity, calculated only to mislead, is worth nothing.



## XLIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*August 21, 1780.*

The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table, when it ceased. In about five minutes, a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out, and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her.

In something less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account. That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss;—she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshort; a little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tanpits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket, to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the words of Terence a

little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*—Yours,  
my dear friend,

W. C.

XLV

*To Mrs. Cowper, Park Street, Grosvenor  
Square.*

*August 31, 1780.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

I am obliged to you for your long letter, which did not seem so ; and for your short one, which was more than I had any reason to expect. Short as it was, it conveyed to me two interesting articles of intelligence : An account of your recovering from a fever, and of Lady Cowper's death. The latter was, I suppose, to be expected, for by what remembrance I have of her ladyship, who was never much acquainted with her, she had reached those years that are always found upon the borders of another world. As for you, your time of life is comparatively of a youthful date. You may think of death as much as you please, (you cannot think of it too much), but I hope you will live to think of it many years.

It costs me not much difficulty to suppose that my friends who were already grown old when I saw them last, are old still ; but it costs me a good deal sometimes to think of those who were at that time young, as being older than they were. Not having been an eye-witness of the change that time has made in them, and my former idea of them not being corrected

by observation, it remains the same; my memory presents me with this image unimpaired, and while it retains the resemblance of what they were, forgets that by this time the picture may have lost much of its likeness, through the alteration that succeeding years have made in the original. I know not what impressions Time may have made upon your person, for while his claws, (as our grannams called them) strike deep furrows in some faces, he seems to sheath them with much tenderness, as if fearful of doing injury to others. But though an enemy to the person, he is a friend to the mind, and you have found him so. Though even in this respect his treatment of us depends upon what he meets with at our hands; if we use him well, and listen to his admonitions, he is a friend indeed, but otherwise the worst of enemies, who takes from us daily something that we valued, and gives us nothing better in its stead. It is well with them who, like you, can stand a tiptoe on the mountain top of human life, look down with pleasure upon the valley they have passed, and sometimes stretch their wings in joyful hope of a happy flight into eternity. Yet a little while, and your hope will be accomplished.

When you can favour me with a little account of your own family, without inconvenience, I shall be glad to receive it; for though separated from my kindred by little more than half a century of miles, I know as little of their concerns as if oceans and continents were interposed between us.—Yours, my dear cousin,

W C.

## XLVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Sept. 3, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am glad you are so provident, and that, while you are yet young, you have furnished yourself with the means of comfort in old age. Your crutch and your pipe may be of use to you, (and may they be so,) should your years be extended to an antediluvian date; and for your present accommodation, you seem to want nothing but a clerk called Snuffle, and a sexton of the name of Skeleton, to make your ministerial equipage complete.

I think I have read as much of the first volume of the *Biographia* as I shall ever read. I find it very amusing; more so perhaps than it would have been had they sifted their characters with more exactness, and admitted none but those who had in some way or other entitled themselves to immortality, by deserving well of the public. Such a compilation would perhaps have been more judicious, though I confess it would have afforded less variety. The priests and the monks of earlier, and the doctors of later days, who have signalized themselves by nothing but a controversial pamphlet, long since thrown by, and never to be perused again, might have been forgotten, without injury or loss to the national character for learning or genius. This observation suggested to me the



following lines, which may serve to illustrate my meaning, and at the same time to give my criticism a sprightlier air.

Oh fond attempt, to give a deathless lot  
To names ignoble, born to be forgot !  
In vain, recorded in historic page,  
They court the notice of a future age ;  
Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land  
Drop one by one, from Fame's neglecting hand ;  
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,  
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.  
So when a child (as playful children use)  
Has burnt to cinder a stale last-year's news,  
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire,  
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,  
There goes the parson——O illustrious spark !  
And there——scarce less illustrious——goes the clerk !

Virgil admits none but worthies into the Elysian Fields ; I cannot recollect the lines in which he describes them all, but these in particular I well remember <sup>1</sup>—

*Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo,  
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.*

A chaste and scrupulous conduct like his would well become the writer of national biography. But enough of this.

Our respects attend Miss Shuttleworth, with many thanks for her intended present. Some purses derive all their value from their contents, but these will have an intrinsic value of their own : and though mine should be often empty, which is not an improbable supposition, I shall esteem it highly on its own account.

<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, vi. 663 sq. Cowper has inverted the order of the two lines.

If you could meet with a second-hand Virgil, ditto Homer, both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, together with a Clavis, for I have no Lexicon, and all tolerably cheap, I shall be obliged to you if you will make the purchase.

—Yours,

W. C.

## XLVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Oct. 5, 1780.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Now for the sequel. You have anticipated one of my arguments in favour of a private education, therefore I need say but little about it. The folly of supposing that the mother-tongue, in some respects the most difficult of all tongues, may be acquired without a teacher, is predominant in all the public schools that I have ever heard of. To pronounce it well, to speak and to write it with fluency and elegance, are no easy attainments; not one in fifty of those who pass through Westminster and Eton, arrive at any remarkable proficiency in these accomplishments; and they that do are more indebted to their own study and application for it, than to any instruction received there. In general, there is nothing so pedantic as the style of a schoolboy, if he aims at any style at all; and if he does not, he is of course inelegant, and perhaps ungrammatical. A defect, no doubt, in great measure owing to the want of cultivation; for the same lad that is often commended for his Latin, frequently would

deserve to be whipped for his English, if the fault were not more his master's than his own. I know not where this evil is so likely to be prevented as at home, —supposing always, nevertheless (which is the case in your instance), that the boy's parents, and their acquaintance, are persons of elegance and taste themselves. For to converse with those who converse with propriety, and to be directed to such authors as have refined and improved the language by their productions, are advantages which he cannot elsewhere enjoy in an equal degree. And though it requires some time to regulate the taste, and fix the judgement, and these effects must be gradually wrought even upon the best understanding, yet I suppose much less time will be necessary for the purpose than could at first be imagined, because the opportunities of improvement are continual.

I promised to say little on this topic, and I have said so much, that if I had not a frank I must burn my letter and begin again.

A public education is often recommended as the most effectual remedy for that bashful and awkward constraint, so epidemical among the youth of our country. But I verily believe that instead of being a cure, it is often the cause of it. For seven or eight years of his life, the boy has hardly seen or conversed with a man, or a woman, except the maids at his boarding house. A gentleman or a lady are consequently such novelties to him that he is perfectly at a loss to know what sort of behaviour he should

preserve before them. He plays with his buttons, or the strings of his hat, he blows his nose, and hangs down his head, is conscious of his own deficiency to a degree that makes him quite unhappy, and trembles lest any one should speak to him, because that would quite overwhelm him. Is not all this miserable shyness evidently the effect of his education? To me it appears to be so. If he saw good company every day, he would never be terrified at the sight of it, and a room full of ladies and gentlemen would alarm him no more than the chairs they sit on. Such is the effect of custom.

I need add nothing further on this subject, because I believe little John is as likely to be exempted from this weakness as most young gentlemen we shall meet with. He seems to have his father's spirit in this respect, in whom I could never discern the least trace of bashfulness, though I have often heard him complain of it. Under your management, and the influence of your example, I think he can hardly fail to escape it. If he does, he escapes that which makes many a man uncomfortable for life; and has ruined not a few, by forcing them into mean and dishonourable company, where only they could be free and cheerful.

Connexions formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are, whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast

of. For my own part, I found such friendships, though warm enough in their commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction; and of seven or eight, whom I had selected for intimates out of about three hundred, in ten years time not one was left me. The truth is, that there may be, and often is, an attachment of one boy to another, that looks very like a friendship; and while they are in circumstances that enable them mutually to oblige and to assist each other, promises well, and bids fair to be lasting. But they are no sooner separated from each other, by entering into the world at large, than other connexions, and new employments, in which they no longer share together, efface the remembrance of what passed in earlier days, and they become strangers to each other for ever. Add to this, that the *man* frequently differs so much from the *boy*,—his principles, manners, temper, and conduct, undergo so great an alteration,—that we no longer recognise in him our old playfellow, but find him utterly unworthy and unfit for the place he once held in our affections.

To close this article as I did the last, by applying myself immediately to the present concern,—little John is happily placed above all occasion for dependence upon such precarious hopes, and need not be sent to school in quest of some great man in embryo, who may possibly make his fortune.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.



## XLVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Dec. 21, 1780.*

I thank you for your anecdote of Judge Carpenter. If it really happened, it is one of the best stories I ever heard; and if not, it has at least the merit of being *ben trovato*. We both very sincerely laughed at it, and think the whole Livery of London must have done the same; though I have known some persons whose faces, as if they had been cast in a mould, could never be provoked to the least alteration of a single feature; so that you might as well relate a good story to a barber's block.

*Non equidem invideo, miror magis.*

Your sentiments with respect to me are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore at this time I suppress it. It is better on every account that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event, should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not, if I would, so neither would I, if I could, deprive them of it.

I annex a long thought in verse for your perusal. It was produced about last midsummer, but I never could prevail with myself, till now, to transcribe it.

You have bestowed some commendations on a certain poem now in the press, and they, I suppose, have at least animated me to the task. If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry, (and why not?) then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine, to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again.

It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called the *Progress of Error*. That will be succeeded by another, in due time, called *Truth*. Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

## XLIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Dec. 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Poetical reports of law cases are not very common, yet it seems to me desirable than they should be so. Many advantages would accrue from such a measure. They would in the first place be more commodiously deposited in the memory, just as linen, grocery, or other such matters, when neatly packed, are known to occupy less room, and to lie more conveniently in any trunk, chest, or box, to which they may be committed. In the next place, being divested of that infinite circumlocution, and the endless embarrassment in which they are involved by it, they would become surprisingly intelligible, in comparison with their present obscurity. And lastly, they would by this means be rendered susceptible of musical embellishment, and instead of being quoted in the courts, with that dull monotony, which is so wearisome to by-standers, and frequently lulls even the judges themselves to sleep, might be rehearsed in recitative; which would have an admirable effect, in keeping the attention fixed and lively, and could not fail to disperse that heavy atmosphere of sadness and gravity, which hangs over the jurisprudence of our country. I remember, many years ago, being informed by a relation of mine, who in his youth had applied himself to the study of the

law, that one of his fellow students, a gentleman of sprightly parts, and very respectable talents of the poetical kind, did actually engage in the prosecution of such a design; for reasons I suppose somewhat similar to, if not the same with those I have now suggested. He began with Coke's *Institutes*; a book so rugged in its style, that an attempt to polish it seemed an Herculean labour, and not less arduous and difficult, than it would be to give the smoothness of a rabbit's fur to the prickly back of a hedgehog. But he succeeded to admiration, as you will perceive by the following specimen, which is all that my said relation could recollect of the performance.

Tenant in fee  
Simple, is he,  
And need neither quake nor quiver,  
Who hath his lands,  
Free from all demands,  
To him and his heirs for ever.

You have an ear for music, and a taste for verse, which saves me the trouble of pointing out with a critical nicety the advantages of such a version. I proceed therefore to what I at first intended, and to transcribe the record of an adjudged case thus managed, to which indeed what I have premised was intended merely as an introduction.<sup>1</sup>

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> This letter concluded with the poetical law case of "Nose, plaintiff—Eyes, defendants."—R. SOUTHEY.

## L

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Jan. 21, 1781.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I am glad that the *Progress of Error* did not Err in its Progress, as I feared it had ; and that it has reached you safe ; and still more pleased that it has met with your approbation ; for if it had not, I should have wished it had miscarried, and have been sorry that the bearer's memory had served him so well upon the occasion. I knew him to be that sort of genius, which, being much busied in making excursions of the imaginary kind, is not always present to its own immediate concerns, much less to those of others ; and having reposed the trust in him, began to regret that I had done so, when it was too late. But I did it to save a frank, and as the affair has turned out, that end was very well answered. This is committed to the hands of a less volatile person, and therefore more to be depended on.

As to the poem called *Truth*, which is already longer than its elder brother, and is yet to be lengthened by the addition of perhaps twenty lines, perhaps more ; I shrink from the thought of transcribing it at present. But as there is no need to be in any hurry about it, I hope that in some rainy season, which the next month will probably bring with it, when perhaps I may be glad of employment, the undertaking will appear less formidable.



You need not withhold from us any intelligence relating to yourselves, upon an apprehension that Mr. Raban has been beforehand with you upon those subjects, for he came down as costive as if you had fed him with nothing but quinces, and unless we engineered him with question after question, we could get nothing out of him. I have known such travellers in my time, and Mrs. Newton is no stranger to one of them, who keep all their observations and discoveries to themselves, till they are extorted from them by mere dint of examination, and cross-examination. He told us indeed that some invisible agent supplied you every Sunday with a coach, which we were pleased with hearing; and this, I think, was the sum total of his information.

We are much concerned for Mr. Barham's loss; but it is well for that gentleman, that those amiable features in his character, which most incline one to sympathise with him, are the very graces and virtues that will strengthen him to bear it with equanimity and patience. People that have neither his light nor experience, will wonder that a disaster which would perhaps have broken their hearts, is not heavy enough to make any abatement in the cheerfulness of his.

Your books came yesterday. I shall not repeat to you what I said to Mrs. Unwin, after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn-out topic, and have actually engaged the favour of the reader by

saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting.

I suppose you know that Mr. Scott will be in town on Tuesday. He is likely to take possession of the Vicarage at last, with the best grace possible ; at least, if he and Mr. Browne can agree upon the terms. The old gentleman I find would be glad to let the house, and abridge the stipend ; in other words to make a good bargain for himself, and starve his curate.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

LI

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Feb. 15, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is possible that Mrs. Hill may not be herself a sufferer by the late terrible catastrophe in the Islands ;<sup>1</sup> but I should suppose by her correspondence with those parts, she may be connected with some that are. In either case, I condole with her ; for it is reasonable to imagine that since the first tour that Columbus made into the Western world, it never before experienced such a convulsion ; perhaps never since the foundation of the globe. You say the state grows old, and discovers many symptoms of decline. A writer, possessed of a genius for hypothesis, like that of Burnet, might construct a plausible argument

<sup>1</sup> The most destructive hurricane ever remembered in the West Indies.—W. BENHAM (who dates the letter February 3).

to prove that the world itself is in a state of superannuation, if there be such a word. If not, there must be such a one as superannuity. When that just equilibrium that has hitherto supported all things, seems to fail, when the elements burst the chain that has bound them, the wind sweeping away the works of man, and man himself together with his works, and the ocean seeming to overleap the command, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," these irregular and prodigious vagaries seem to bespeak a decay, and forebode, perhaps, not a very distant dissolution. This thought has so run away with my attention, that I have left myself no room for the little politics that have only Great Britain for their object. Who knows but that while a thousand, and ten thousand tongues are employed in adjusting the scale of our national concerns, in complaining of new taxes, and funds loaded with a debt of accumulating millions, the consummation of all things may discharge it in a moment, and the scene of all this bustle disappear, as if it had never been? Charles Fox would say, perhaps, he thought it very unlikely. I question if he could prove even that. I am sure, however, he could not prove it to be impossible.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

## LII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Feb. 18, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I send you *Table Talk*. It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweet-meat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one

bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed.

As to the word you mention, I a little suspected that you would object to it, though I really thought that a book which cannot be supposed to have been written under a blessing, and that has certainly carried mischief with it into many families, deserved an epithet as harsh as that which I had given it. It is a bargain however that I have made with my lady Muse, never to defend, or stickle for any thing that you object to. So the line may stand if you please thus,

Abhorr'd Thelyphthora,<sup>1</sup> &c.

—you will meet with the obnoxious word again, in the copy I send you now, but coupled with a substantive of so filthy a character, that I persuade myself you will have no objection to the use of it in such a connexion. I am no friend to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the diabolical dictionary, but it happens sometimes that a coarse expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject. I am obliged to you, however, for your opinion; and though poetry is apt to betray one into a warmth that one is not sensible of in writing prose, shall always desire to be set down by it.

We are glad that so able a writer as Mr. Hill has taken up the cudgels. He is old enough to know how

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 48, note.



to reason with precision, and young enough to do it with fire and spirit. In conflicting with a disputant like Mr. Madan, I should suppose these two qualifications almost equally necessary. A writer like him, who knows how to get the laugh on his side, would be pretty secure of having the world on his side too, if his adversary had no skill in the use of the same weapon. It is such a merry world that Truth herself seems to want one of her principal recommendations, unless she will now and then condescend to the prevailing temper of her hearers. But you say you think it will do, and therefore I have no doubt of it.

Mr. Scott told Mr. Wilson yesterday or the day before, that he had again asked Mr. Raban whether or not he intended to continue his speaking, and that Mr. Raban would give him no determinate answer. This I had from Mr. Wilson himself. It will be well if that business ends peaceably. Nothing could be more tenderly cogent than your letter to his colleague, and he, for aught I know, may be properly influenced by it; but it seems plain that either the before-mentioned had not seen it, or that if he had, he had not felt it.—Geary Ball has lost his wife. She was buried on Thursday, having left her friends a comfortable hope of her welfare.

You had been married thirty-one years last Monday. When you married I was eighteen years of age, and had just left Westminster school. At that time, I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste

in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life, than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure, as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood, that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed*; I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures. Then I learned the truth, and then I lost it; and there ends my history. I would no more than you wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason. He that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey.—Yours, my dear Sir, with our joint love,

W. C.

### LIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 5, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses

on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that cheap ingredient, the name of the author. If my name therefore will serve them in any degree, as a passport into the public notice, they are welcome to it; and Mr. Johnson will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

Of the Inner Temple.

If you are of my mind, I think *Table Talk* will be the best to begin with, as the subjects of it are perhaps more popular; and one would wish, at first setting out, to catch the public by the ear, and hold them by it as fast as possible, that they may be willing to hear one, on a second and a third occasion.

The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think that it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I mean to stickle for it as a pretty creature of my own that I am loth to part with—but I am apprehensive that without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph would not show to advantage.—If the world had been filled with men like yourself, I should never have written it; but thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle, if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularly I did

not feel.—As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage ; notwithstanding which it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances, and with his power to embolden them.

I am glad that the myrtles reached you safe, but am persuaded from past experience that no management will keep them long alive in London, especially in the city. Our English Trots,<sup>1</sup> the natives of the country, are for the most part too delicate to thrive there, much more the nice Italian. To give them, however, the best chance they can have, the lady must keep them well watered, giving them a moderate quantity in summer time every other day, and in winter about twice a week ; not spring-water, for that would kill them. At Michaelmas, as much of the mould as can be taken out without disturbing the roots must be evacuated, and its place supplied with fresh, the lighter the better. And once in two years the plants must be drawn out of their pots with the entire ball of earth about them, and the matted roots

<sup>1</sup> What word has been thus mis-printed I am unable to guess, and the original letter is one of those which have not been preserved in Mr. Newton's collection.—R. SOUTHEY. In his edition of Cowper's Letters Mr. Thomas Wright prints [sorts] for Trots, a plausible emendation.

pared off with a sharp knife, when they must be planted again with an addition of rich light earth as before. Thus dealt with, they will grow luxuriantly in a green-house, where they can have plenty of sweet air, which is absolutely necessary to their health. I used to purchase them at Covent Garden almost every year, when I lived in the Temple; but even in that airy situation they were sure to lose their leaf in winter, and seldom recovered it again in spring. I wish them a better fate at Hoxton.

Olney has seen this day what it never saw before, and what will serve it to talk of, I suppose, for years to come. At eleven o'clock this morning, a party of soldiers entered the town, driving before them another party, who, after obstinately defending the bridge for some time, were obliged to quit it, and run. They ran in very good order, frequently faced about and fired, but were at last obliged to surrender prisoners of war. There has been much drumming and shouting, much scampering about in the dirt, but not an inch of lace made in the town, at least at the Silver End of it.

It is our joint request that you will not again leave us unwritten to for a fortnight. We are so like yourselves in this particular, that we cannot help ascribing so long a silence to the worst cause. The longer your letters the better, but a short one is better than none.

Mrs. Unwin is pretty well, and adds the greetings of her love to mine.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.



## LIV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*May 1, 1781.*

Your mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology ; I might otherwise plead, that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as well as for myself, that I should let it alone ; but all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest, are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must*. You have still however one comfort left, that what I must write, you may, or may not read, just as it shall please you ; unless Lady Anne at your elbow should say, you *must* read it, and then like a true knight you will obey without looking out for a remedy.

I do not love to harp upon strings that, to say the least, are not so musical as one would wish. But you I know have many a time sacrificed your own feelings to those of others, and where an act of charity leads you, are not easily put out of your way. This consideration encourages me just to insinuate that your silence on the subject of a certain nomination is distressful to more than you would wish, in particular to the little boy whose clothes are outgrown and worn out ; and to his mother, who is unwilling to furnish him with a new suit, having reason to suppose that

the long blue petticoat would soon supersede it, if she should.

In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, *Poems*, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them : but the truth is, that they are most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two-thirds of the compilation will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand and five hundred lines ; are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of *Table Talk*—*The Progress of Error*—*Truth*—*Expostulation*. Mr. Newton writes a Preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing,) has been this ; that till within these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true ; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them ; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine, to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks, whether any bookseller would be willing to

subject himself to an ambiguity, that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come. I shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne, in your next frank. My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## LV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

May 9, 1781.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am in the press, and it is in vain to deny it. But how mysterious is the conveyance of intelligence from one end to the other of your great city!—Not many days since, except one man, and he but a little taller than yourself, all London was ignorant of it; for I do not suppose that the public prints have yet announced this most agreeable tidings, the title-page, which is the basis of the advertisement, having so lately reached the publisher: and now it is known to you, who live at least two miles distant from my confidant upon the occasion.

My labours are principally the production of the last winter; all indeed, except a few of the minor pieces. When I can find no other occupation, I think, and when I think, I am very apt to do it in rhyme.

Hence it comes to pass that the season of the year which generally pinches off the flowers of poetry, unfolds mine, such as they are, and crowns me with a winter garland.<sup>1</sup> In this respect therefore, I and

<sup>1</sup> Similarly Milton, to explain why he made no progress with *Paradise Lost* in summer, confessed to his nephew Phillips "that his vein never flowed but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal, and that whatever he attempted [at other seasons] was never to his satisfaction, though he courted his fancy never so much." See the *Life of Milton* prefixed to Mr. R. C. Browne's edition of his poems (Oxford, 1876), vol. i. pp. xxiv. sq. So, too, Wordsworth, in the sonnet beginning "While not a leaf seems faded," greets the first nipping airs of September as the heralds of

"A season potent to renew,  
'Mid frost and snow, the instinctive joys of song,  
And nobler cares than listless summer knew."

And in a note prefixed to it he refers to "that state of robust constitution which prompted me to rejoice in a season of frost and snow as more favourable to the Muses than summer itself." Keble, also, in the poem beginning, "Dear is the morning gale of spring," tells us that the wings of the poet's fancy always speed from the cloudless skies of summer to spring or autumn. Alfieri says of himself: "I likewise experienced that my intellectual faculties resembled a barometer, and that I possessed more or less talent for composition in proportion to the weight of the atmosphere. During the prevalence of the solstitial and equinoctial winds, I was always remarkably stupid, and uniformly evinced less penetration in the evening than the morning. I likewise perceived that the force of my imagination, the ardour of enthusiasm, and capability of invention, were possessed by me in a higher degree in the middle of winter or in the middle of summer, than during the intermediate periods." See Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1844), vol. i. p. 371. It might be interesting to collect evidence of the sensibility of literary and artistic genius to the influence of weather, climate, and the seasons. In his essay on "Popular Fallacies," Charles Lamb expresses the view that candle-light is more favourable than sunlight to the working of the poetical fancy; and Goethe seems to hint at the same thing in the lines which he puts in the mouth of Faust:

"Ach, wenn in unsrer engen Zelle  
Die Lampe freundlich wieder brennt," etc.

my contemporary bards are by no means upon a par. They write when the delightful influences of fine weather, fine prospects, and a brisk motion of the animal spirits, make poetry almost the language of nature ; and I, when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel, and when a reasonable man would as little expect to succeed in verse, as to hear a blackbird whistle. This must be my apology to you for whatever want of fire and animation you may observe in what you will shortly have the perusal of. As to the public, if they like me not, there is no remedy. A friend will weigh and consider all disadvantages, and make as large allowances as an author can wish, and larger perhaps than he has any right to expect ; but not so the world at large ; whatever they do not like, they will not by any apology be persuaded to forgive, and it would be in vain to tell *them*, that I wrote my verses in January, for they would immediately reply, "Why did not you write them in May?" A question that might puzzle a wiser head than we poets are generally blessed with.

W. C.

LVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*May 23, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer ! Your desire to see my muse



in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—"The poet is coming!"—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter.

This misfortune however comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important, where poetry is concerned! A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps, which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud of. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler, who will fancy himself a poet too, and what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an

author cannot know his own work again. Now as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted, when I reflect that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence; and yet not without your assistance. It will be quite necessary, that the correspondence between me and Johnson should be carried on without the expense of postage, because proof sheets would make double or treble letters, which expense, as in every instance it must occur twice, first when the packet is sent, and again when it is returned, would be rather inconvenient to me, who, as you perceive, am forced to live by my wits, and to him, who hopes to get a little matter no doubt by the same means. Half a dozen franks therefore to me, and *totidem* to him, will be singularly acceptable, if you can, without feeling it in any respect a trouble, procure them for me.

My neckcloths being all worn out, I intend to wear stocks, but not unless they are more fashionable than the former. In that case, I shall be obliged to you if you will buy me a handsome stock-buckle, for a very little money; for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a figure at Olney.

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, *that* is

epigrammatic and witty in Latin, which would be perfectly insipid in English; and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult, and the most expensive part of the whole composition, and could not perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in comparing the Jackdaw with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point which, though smart enough in the Latin, would, in English, have appeared as plain, and as blunt, as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster, when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for every thing that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all this drollery there is a mixture of rational,

and even religious reflection at times : and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense ; who is always entertaining, and yet always harmless ; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found even in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas, than by the neatness and purity of his verse ; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again.

I am delighted with your project, but not with the view I have of its success. If the world would form its opinion of the clerical character at large, from yours in particular, I have no doubt but the event would be as prosperous as you could wish. But I suppose there is not a member of either house who does not see within the circle of his own acquaintance, a minister, perhaps many ministers, whose integrity would contribute but little to the effect of such a bill. Here are seven or eight in the neighbourhood of Olney, who have shaken hands with sobriety, and who would rather suppress the church, were it not for the emoluments annexed, than discourage the sale of strong beer in a single instance. Were I myself in Parliament, I am not sure that I could favour your scheme ; are there not to be found within five miles of almost every neighbourhood, parsons who would purchase

well accustomed public-houses, because they could secure them a license, and patronize them when they had done? I think no penalty would prevent the abuse, on account of the difficulty of proof, and that no ingenuity could guard against all the possible abuses. To sum up all in few words, the generality of the clergy, especially within these last twenty or thirty years, have worn their circingles so loose, that I verily believe no measure that proposed an accession of privilege to an order which the laity retain but little respect for, would meet with the countenance of the legislature. You will do me the justice to suppose that I do not say these things to gratify a splenetic humour or a censorious turn of mind; far from it,—it may add, perhaps, to the severity of the foregoing observation to assert, and if it does, I cannot help asserting, that I verily believe them to be founded upon fact, and that I am sure, partly from my own knowledge, and partly from the report of those whose veracity I can depend upon, that in this part of the world at least, many of the most profligate characters are the very men to whom the morals, and even the souls of others are entrusted; and I cannot suppose that the diocese of Lincoln, or this part of it in particular, is more unfortunate in that respect than the rest of the kingdom.

Since I began to write long poems, I seem to turn up my nose at the idea of a short one. I have lately entered upon one, which, if ever finished, cannot easily be comprised in much less than a thousand lines! But



this must make part of a second publication, and be accompanied, in due time, by others not yet thought of; for it seems (which I did not know till the book-seller had occasion to tell me so) that single pieces stand no chance, and that nothing less than a volume will go down. You yourself afford me a proof of the certainty of this intelligence, by sending me franks which nothing less than a volume can fill. I have accordingly sent you one, but am obliged to add, that had the wind been in any other point of the compass, or, blowing as it does from the east, had it been less boisterous, you must have been contented with a much shorter letter, but the abridgement of every other occupation is very favourable to that of writing.

I am glad I did not expect to hear from you by this post, for the boy has lost the bag in which your letter must have been enclosed;—another reason for my prolixity!—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

## LVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*May, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I believe I never give you trouble without feeling more than I give; so much by way of preface and apology.

Thus stands the case. Johnson has begun to print, and Mr. Newton has already corrected the first sheet.

This unexpected despatch makes it necessary for me to furnish myself with means of communication, viz. the franks, as soon as may be. There are reasons (I believe I mentioned them in my last) why I choose to revise the proofs myself:—nevertheless, if your delicacy must suffer the puncture of a pin's point in procuring the franks for me, I release you entirely from the task; you are as free as if I had never mentioned them. But you will oblige me by a speedy answer upon this subject, because it is expedient that the printer should know to whom he is to send his copy; and when the press is once set, those humble servants of the poets are rather impatient of any delay, because the types are wanted for other authors, who are equally in haste to be born.

This fine weather I suppose sets you on horseback, and allures the ladies into the garden. If I was at Stock, I should be of their party; and while they sat knotting or netting in the shade, should comfort myself with the thought, that I had not a beast under me, whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture; I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind. When I was a boy, I excelled at cricket and foot-ball, but the fame I acquired by achievements in that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing since. I am sure however that

she did not design me for a horseman ; and that, if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever. I am rather straitened in time, and not very rich in materials, therefore, with our joint love to you all, conclude myself, yours ever,

W. C.

### LVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

May 28, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am much obliged to you for the pains you have taken with my *Table Talk*, and wish that my *vivâ voce* Table Talk could repay you for the trouble you have had with the written one.

I am quite surprised at Johnson's diligence, and began to wish, while reading your account of it, that I had left the business of correction in your hands ; but presently recollecting that it is a tedious troublesome employment, and fit only for the author himself to be burthened with, I relapsed into my former sentiment. My franks are not yet ready, but I shall lose no time in procuring them if they are to be got. I enclose a line to Johnson, to tell him that if in the mean time, and while you are absent from town, another parcel of the proof should be ready for revisal, I wish him to send it hither by the diligence. I am as well convinced of the accuracy and exactness with which you would perform the task, as it is possible for me to be

of my own, and if I can obtain no franks shall after all have recourse to your assistance.

The season is wonderfully improved within this day or two ; and if these cloudless skies are continued to us, or rather if the cold winds do not set in again, promises you a pleasant excursion, as far, at least, as the weather can conduce to make it such. You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel, and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity.<sup>1</sup> If you could spend a day now and then in those forests, and return with a wish to England, it would be no small addition to the number of your best pleasures. But *pennæ non homini datæ*. The time will come perhaps, (but death must come first,) when you will be able to visit them without either danger, trouble, or expense ; and when the contemplation of those well-remembered scenes will awaken in you emotions of gratitude and praise surpassing all you could possibly sustain at present. In this sense, I suppose, there is a heaven upon earth at all times, and that the

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. John Newton was for some time in his early life a slave-trader between the coast of Africa and the West Indies. If the words "the land of your captivity" could be understood to mean, "the land where you carried other people into captivity," they would be very appropriate.

disembodied spirit may find a peculiar joy arising from the contemplation of those places it was formerly conversant with, and so far, at least, be reconciled to a world it was once so weary of, as to use it in the delightful way of thankful recollection.

Miss Catlett must not think of any other lodging than we can without any inconvenience, as we shall with all possible pleasure, furnish her with. We can each of us say,—that is, I can say it in Latin, and Mrs. Unwin in English,—*Nihil tui à me alienum puto*. She shall have a great bed and a great room, and we shall have the chamber we always occupy when we have company, and should certainly occupy, if she was not of the party. This state of the case leaves no room for the least objection; we desire therefore that you will give our love to her, tell her we shall expect her, and that she will be but half as welcome to us if she sleeps any where else.

Having two more letters to write, I find myself obliged to shorten this; so once more wishing you a good journey, and ourselves the happiness of receiving you in good health and spirits, I remain, affectionately yours,

W. C.

## LIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

*June 5, 1781.*

If the old adage be true, that “he gives twice, who gives speedily,” it is equally true, that he who not



only uses expedition in giving, but gives more than was asked, gives thrice at least. Such is the style in which Mr. Smith confers a favour. He has not only sent me franks to Johnson, but, under another cover, has added six to you. These last, for aught that appears by your letter, he threw in of his own mere bounty. I beg that my share of thanks may not be wanting on this occasion, and that when you write to him next you will assure him of the sense I have of the obligation, which is the more flattering, as it includes a proof of his predilection in favour of the poems his franks are destined to enclose. May they not forfeit his good opinion hereafter, nor yours, to whom I hold myself indebted in the first place, and who have equally given me credit for their deservings ! Your mother says, that although there are passages in them containing opinions which will not be universally subscribed to, the world will at least allow—what my great modesty will not permit me to subjoin. I have the highest opinion of her judgement, and know, by having experienced the soundness of them, that her observations are always worthy of attention and regard. Yet, strange as it may seem, I do not feel the vanity of an author, when she commends me ;—but I feel something better, a spur to my diligence, and a cordial to my spirits, both together animating me to deserve, at least not to fall short of her expectations. For I verily believe, if my dulness should earn me the character of a dunce, the censure would affect her more than me ; not that I am insensible of the value

of a good name, either as a man or an author. Without an ambition to attain it, it is absolutely unattainable under either of those descriptions. But my life having been in many respects a series of mortifications and disappointments, I am become less apprehensive and impressible perhaps in some points, than I should otherwise have been; and though I should be exquisitely sorry to disgrace my friends, could endure my own share of the affliction with a reasonable measure of tranquillity.

These seasonable showers have poured floods upon all the neighbouring parishes, but have passed us by. My garden languishes, and, what is worse, the fields too languish, and the upland grass is burnt. These discriminations are not fortuitous. But if they are providential, what do they import? I can only answer, as a friend of mine once answered a mathematical question in the schools—“*Prorsus nescio.*” Perhaps it is, that men, who will not believe what they cannot understand, may learn the folly of their conduct, while their very senses are made to witness against them; and themselves in the course of Providence become the subjects of a thousand dispensations they cannot explain. But the end is never answered. The lesson is inculcated indeed frequently enough, but nobody learns it. Well. Instruction vouchsafed in vain is (I suppose) a debt to be accounted for hereafter. You must understand this to be a soliloquy. I wrote my thoughts without recollecting that I was writing a letter, and to you.

W. C.

## LX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*July 12, 1781.*

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows, whether what I have got, be verse or not: by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme; but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before? The thought did occur, to me and to her, as Madam and I, did walk and not fly, over hills and dales, with spreading sails, before it was dark, to Weston Park.

The news at *Oney* is little or noney, but such as it is, I send it, viz. Poor Mr. Peace cannot yet cease, addling his head with what you said, and has left parish-church quite in the lurch, having almost sworn to go there no more.

Page and his wife, that made such a strife, we met them twain in Dog Lane; we gave them the wall, and that was all. For Mr. Scott, we have seen him not, except as he pass'd, in a wonderful haste, to see a friend in Silver End. Mrs. Jones proposes, ere July closes, that she and her sister, and her Jones Mister, and we that are here, our course shall steer, to dine in the Spinney; but for a guinea, if the weather should hold, so hot and so cold, we had better by far stay where we are. For the grass there grows, while no-

body mows, (which is very wrong,) so rank and long, that so to speak, 'tis at least a week, if it happens to rain, ere it dries again.

I have writ *Charity*, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good ; and if the Reviewer should say "to be sure, the gentleman's Muse, wears Methodist shoes ; you may know by her pace, and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard, for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoidening play, of the modern day ; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan, to catch if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production, on a new construction. She has baited her trap in hopes to snap all that may come, with a sugar-plum."——His opinion in this, will not be amiss ; 'tis what I intend, my principal end ; and if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid, for all I have said, and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence, to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor, laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in, you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe or string, or any such thing ; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what

will make you dance, and as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I have penn'd ; which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jiggling about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me—

W. C.

P.S.—When I concluded, doubtless you did think me right, as well you might, in saying what I said of Scott ; and then it was true, but now it is due, to him to note, that since I wrote, himself and he has visited we.<sup>1</sup>

## LXI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July 29, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having given the case you laid before me in your last all due consideration, I proceed to answer it ; and in order to clear my way, shall, in the first place, set down my sense of those passages in Scripture which, on a hasty perusal, seem to clash with the opinion I am going to give—"If a man smite one cheek, turn the other"—"If he take thy cloak, let him take thy coat also." That is, I suppose, rather than on a vindictive principle avail yourself of that remedy

<sup>1</sup> This letter was first printed entire in the Memoir of Cowper, prefixed to the edition of his poems among the Aldine Poets ; the most judicious memoir and the best arranged edition that has yet appeared.—R. SOUTHEY.



the law allows you, in the way of retaliation, for that was the subject immediately under the discussion of the speaker. Nothing is so contrary to the genius of the Gospel, as the gratification of resentment and revenge ; but I cannot easily persuade myself to think, that the author of that dispensation could possibly advise his followers to consult their own peace at the expense of the peace of society, or inculcate a universal abstinence from the use of lawful remedies, to the encouragement of injury and oppression.

St. Paul again seems to condemn the practice of going to law, "Why do ye not rather suffer wrong?" &c. But if we look again, we shall find that a litigious temper had obtained, and was prevalent among the professors of the day. This he condemned, and with good reason ; it was unseemly to the last degree, that the disciples of the Prince of Peace should worry and vex each other with injurious treatment, and unnecessary disputes, to the scandal of their religion in the eyes of the heathen. But surely he did not mean any more than his Master, in the place above alluded to, that the most harmless members of society should receive no advantage of its laws, or should be the only persons in the world who should derive no benefit from those institutions, without which society cannot subsist. Neither of them could mean to throw down the pale of property, and to lay the Christian part of the world open, throughout all ages, to the incursions of unlimited violence and wrong.

By this time you are sufficiently aware, that I think you have an indisputable right to recover at law what is so dishonestly withheld from you. The fellow, I suppose, has discernment enough to see a difference between you and the generality of the clergy, and cunning enough to conceive the purpose of turning your meekness and forbearance to good account, and of coining them into hard cash, which he means to put in his pocket. But I would disappoint him, and show him, that though a Christian is not to be quarrelsome, he is not to be crushed; and that though he is but a worm before God, he is not such a worm as every selfish unprincipled wretch may tread upon at his pleasure.

I lately heard a story from a lady, who has spent many years of her life in France, somewhat to the present purpose. An Abbé, universally esteemed for his piety, and especially for the meekness of his manners, had yet undesignedly given some offence to a shabby fellow in his parish. The man, concluding he might do as he pleased with so forgiving and gentle a character, struck him on one cheek, and bade him turn the other. The good man did so, and when he had received the two slaps, which he thought himself obliged to submit to, turned again, and beat him soundly. I do not wish to see you follow the French gentleman's example, but I believe nobody that has heard the story condemns him much for the spirit he showed upon the occasion.

I had the relation from Lady Austen, sister to

Mrs. Jones, wife of the minister at Clifton. She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me ; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'nnight we all dined together in the *Spinnie*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *Fête Champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table ; our dining-room was a root-house lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under a great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other. A happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.—Yours, with our joint love,

W. C.

## LXII

*To Mrs. Newton.**Aug. 1781.*

DEAR MADAM,

Though much obliged to you for the favour of your last, and ready enough to acknowledge the debt, the

present, however, is not a day in which I should have chosen to pay it. A dejection of mind, which perhaps may be removed by to-morrow, rather disqualifies me for writing,—a business I would always perform in good spirits, because melancholy is catching, especially where there is much sympathy to assist the contagion. But certain poultry, which I understand are about to pay their respects to you, have advertised for an agreeable companion, and I find myself obliged to embrace the opportunity of going to town with them in that capacity.

I thank you for your little abridgment of my family's history. Like every thing that relates to the present world, in which there seems to be nearly an equal mixture of the lamentable and ridiculous, it affords both occasion to laugh and to cry. In this single instance of my uncle, I can see cause for both. He trembles upon the verge of fourscore : a white hat with a yellow lining is no indication of wisdom suitable to so great an age ; he can go but one step farther in the road of impropriety, and direct his executor to bury him in it. He is a very little man, and had he lined his hat with pink instead of yellow, might have been gathered by a natural mistake for a mushroom, and sent off in a basket.

While the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. And, after all, what can fashion do for its most obsequious followers? It can ring the changes upon the same things, and it can do no more. Whether our hats be white or black, our caps high or



low,—whether we wear two watches or one, is of little consequence. There is indeed an appearance of variety; but the folly and vanity that dictates and adopts the change, are invariably the same. When the fashions of a particular period appear more reasonable than those of the preceding, it is not because the world is grown more reasonable than it was; but because, in a course of perpetual changes, some of them must sometimes happen to be for the better. Neither do I suppose the preposterous customs that prevail at present, a proof of its greater folly. In a few years, perhaps next year, the fine gentleman will shut up his umbrella, and give it to his sister, filling his hand with a crab-tree cudgel instead of it: and when he has done so, will he be wiser than now? By no means. The love of change will have betrayed him into a propriety, which, in reality, he has no taste for, all his merit on the occasion amounting to no more than this—that, being weary of one plaything, he has taken up another.

In a note I received from Johnson last week, he expresses a wish that my pen may be still employed. Supposing it possible that he would yet be glad to swell the volume, I have given him an order to draw upon me for eight hundred lines, if he chooses it; *Conversation*, a piece which I think I mentioned in my last to Mr. Newton, being finished. If Johnson sends for it, I shall transcribe it as soon as I can, and transmit it to Charles Square. Mr. Newton will take the trouble to forward it to the press. It is not



a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise ; nor does it bear the least resemblance to *Table Talk*, except that it is serio-comic, like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when he endued them with the faculty of speech ; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business, and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober.

We felt ourselves not the less obliged to you for the cocoa-nuts, though they were good for nothing. They contained nothing but a putrid liquor, with a round white lump, which in taste and substance much resembled tallow, and was of the size of a small walnut. Nor am I the less indebted to your kindness for the fish, though none is yet come. Mrs. Unwin does not forget the eggs, but while the harvest continues puddings are in such request, that the farmers will not part with them.

Our joint love to both, and to Miss Catlett, if at home. Sir's letter, for which I thank him, shall have an answer as soon as possible.—Yours, dear madam, most affectionately,

W. C.

### LXIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Aug. 16, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls

hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded, by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep, where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. Not to mention the exchange of a sweet smelling garden, for the putrid exhalations of Silver End. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once advert-ing to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably

burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel ; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind ; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance ; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification ; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this ; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them ; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that,

humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation: the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing, make the subject of my letters to you.

Johnson sent me lately a sort of apology for his printer's negligence, with his promise of greater diligence for the future. There was need enough of both. I have received but one sheet since you left us. Still, indeed, I see that there is time enough before us; but I see likewise that no length of time can be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that does not go forward. I know not yet whether he will add *Conversation* to those poems already in his hands, nor do I care much. No man ever wrote such quantities of verse, as I have written this last year, with so much indifference about the event, or rather, with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved, the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely to attain the end of usefulness; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once have had;—my labour must go unrewarded, and as Mr. Raban once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in, and not I.

I have left myself no room for politics, which I thought, when I began, would have been my principal theme.

Mr. Symonds's letters certainly are not here. Our servants never touch a paper without leave, and are so observant of our injunction in this particular, that unless I burn the covers of the news, they accumulate till they make a litter.—Yours, my dear sir,

WM. COWPER.

LXIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Aug. 21, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You wish you could employ your time to better purpose, yet are never idle. In all that you say or do ; whether you are alone, or pay visits, or receive them ; whether you think or write, or walk or sit still ; the state of your mind is such as discovers even to yourself, in spite of all its wanderings, that there is a principle at bottom whose determined tendency is towards the best things. I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pesters you without ceasing ; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace with the riot-act in his hand, ready to read it, and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a



sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants. They turn too upon spiritual subjects, but the tallest fellow and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; periisti!* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but however earnestly invited, is coy, and keeps at a distance. Yet with all this distressing gloom upon my mind, I experience, as you do, the slipperiness of the present hour, and the rapidity with which time escapes me. Every thing around us, and every thing that befalls us, constitutes a variety, which, whether agreeable or otherwise, has still a thievish propensity, and steals from us days, months, and years, with such unparalleled address, that even while we say they are here, they are gone. From infancy to manhood is rather a tedious period, chiefly, I suppose, because at that time we act under the controul of others, and are not suffered to have a will of our own. But thence downward into the vale of years, is such a declivity, that we have just an opportunity to reflect upon the steepness of it, and then find ourselves at the bottom.

Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, how-

ever, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the greenhouse, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene, and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted.

Cocoa-nut naught,  
Fish too dear,  
None must be bought  
For us that are here.

No lobster on earth,  
That ever I saw,  
To me would be worth  
Sixpence a claw.

So, dear madam, wait  
Till fish can be got  
At a reas'nable rate,  
Whether lobster or not ;

Till the French and the Dutch  
Have quitted the seas,  
And then send as much  
And as oft as you please.

—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

LXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*August 25, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We rejoice with you sincerely in the birth of another son, and in the prospect you have of Mrs. Unwin's recovery ; may your three children, and the next three, when they shall make their appearance, prove so many blessings to their parents, and make you wish that you had twice the number. But what made you expect daily that you should hear from me? Letter for letter is the law of all correspondence whatsoever, and because I wrote last, I have indulged myself for some time in expectation of a sheet from you. Not that I govern myself entirely by the punctilio of

reciprocation, but having been pretty much occupied of late, I was not sorry to find myself at liberty to exercise my discretion, and furnished with a good excuse if I chose to be silent.

I expected, as you remember, to have been published last spring, and was disappointed. The delay has afforded me an opportunity to increase the quantity of my publication by about a third; and if my muse has not forsaken me, which I rather suspect to be the case, may possibly yet add to it. I have a subject in hand, which promises me a great abundance of poetical matter, but which, for want of a something I am not able to describe, I cannot at present proceed with. The name of it is "*Retirement*," and my purpose, to recommend the proper improvement of it, to set forth the requisites for that end, and to enlarge upon the happiness of that state of life, when managed as it ought to be. In the course of my journey through this ample theme, I should wish to touch upon the characters, the deficiencies, and the mistakes of thousands, who enter on a scene of retirement, unqualified for it in every respect, and with such designs as have no tendency to promote either their own happiness or that of others. But as I have told you before, there are times when I am no more a poet than I am a mathematician; and when such a time occurs, I always think it better to give up the point, than to labour it in vain. I shall yet again be obliged to trouble you for franks; the addition of three thousand lines, or near that number, having

occasioned a demand which I did not always foresee : but your obliging friend, and your obliging self, having allowed me the liberty of application, I make it without apology.

The solitude, or rather the duality of our condition at Olney, seems drawing to a conclusion. You have not forgot, perhaps, that the building we inhabit consists of two mansions. And because you have only seen the inside of that part of it which is in our occupation, I therefore inform you, that the other end of it is by far the most superb, as well as the most commodious. Lady Austen has seen it, has set her heart upon it, is going to fit it up and furnish it, and if she can get rid of the remaining two years of the lease of her London house, will probably enter upon it in a twelvemonth. You will be pleased with this intelligence, because I have already told you, that she is a woman perfectly well bred, sensible, and in every respect agreeable ; and above all, because she loves your mother dearly. It has in my eyes, (and I doubt not it will have the same in yours,) strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes, recommended by a variety of considerations, to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came, we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits,



a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other.

Your mother sends her warm affections, and welcomes into the world the new-born William.—Yours,  
my dear friend,

W. C.

LXVI

*To Mrs. Newton.*

*Sept. 16, 1781.*

A NOBLE theme demands a noble verse,  
In such I thank you for your fine oysters.  
The barrel was magnificently large,  
But being sent to Olney at free charge,  
Was not inserted in the driver's list,  
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or miss'd;  
For when the messenger whom we dispatch'd  
Enquired for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd,

Denying that his waggon or his wain  
Did any such commodity contain.  
In consequence of which, your welcome boon  
Did not arrive till yesterday at noon ;  
In consequence of which some chanced to die,  
And some, though very sweet, were very dry.  
Now Madam says, (and what she says must still  
Deserve attention, say she what she will,)  
That what we call the Diligence, be-case  
It goes to London with a swifter pace,  
Would better suit the carriage of your gift,  
Returning downward with a pace as swift ;  
And therefore recommends it with this aim—  
To save at least three days,—the price the same ;  
For though it will not carry or convey  
For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may,  
For oysters bred upon the salt sea shore,  
Pack'd in a barrel, they will charge no more.

News have I none that I can deign to write,  
Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night ;  
And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,  
Caught in the first beginning of the shower ;  
But walking, running, and with much ado,  
Got home—just time enough to be wet through.  
Yet both are well, and wond'rous to be told,  
Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold ;  
And wishing just the same good hap to you,  
We say, good Madam, and good Sir, Adieu !

## LXVII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

THE GREENHOUSE, *Sept.* 18, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I return your preface, with many thanks for so affectionate an introduction to the public. I have observed nothing that in my judgement required alteration, except a single sentence in the first paragraph, which I have not obliterated, that you may restore it if you please, by obliterating my interlineation. My reason for proposing an amendment of it was, that your meaning did not strike me, which therefore I have endeavoured to make more obvious. The rest is what I would wish it to be. You say, indeed, more in my commendation, than I can modestly say of myself: but something will be allowed to the partiality of friendship, on so interesting an occasion.

I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed, like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously: but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to

those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the *Dunciad*; but on being advised to read before he judged him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured.

I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been writing, and at present I am not much in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard

drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore; and remember that if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne,) has been warm in the praise of it.

*Retirement* grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning: now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen. It consists at present, I suppose, of between six and seven hundred; so that there are hopes of an end, and I dare say Johnson will give me time enough to finish it.

I nothing add but this—that *still I am*  
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

## LXVIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Sept. 26, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I may, I suppose, congratulate you on your safe arrival at Brighthelmstone; and am the better pleased with your design to close the summer there, because I am acquainted with the place, and, by the assistance



of fancy, can without much difficulty join myself to the party, and partake with you in your amusements and excursions. It happened singularly enough, that just before I received your last, in which you apprize me of your intended journey, I had been writing upon the subject, having found occasion towards the close of my last poem, called *Retirement*, to take some notice of the modern passion for sea-side entertainments, and to direct to the means by which they might be made useful as well as agreeable. I think with you, that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment, when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion, and even without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because, at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves would preach to me, and that in the midst of dissipation I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakespeare's characters says,—“I am never merry when I hear sweet music.” The same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him, I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy not displeasing, nor without its use. So much for *Signor Netuno*.

Lady Austen goes to London this day se'nnight.

We have told her that you shall visit her ; which is an enterprise you may engage in with the more alacrity, because as she loves every thing that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. Add to this, that your own personal recommendations are by no means small, or such as a woman of her fine taste and discernment can possibly overlook. She has many features in her character which you will admire ; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it ; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most, and the most harmless vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is—what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her ; and when I hear you have a journey to town in contemplation, I will send you her address.

Your mother is well, and joins with me in wishing that you may spend your time agreeably upon the coast of Sussex.—Yours,

W. C.

## LXIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*October 6, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

What a world are you daily conversant with, which I have not seen these twenty years, and shall never see again! The arts of dissipation (I suppose) are no where practised with more refinement or success than at the place of your present residence. By your account of it, it seems to be just what it was when I visited it, a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping; the rooms perhaps more magnificent, because the proprietors are grown richer, but the manners and occupations of the company just the same. Though my life has long been like that of a recluse, I have not the temper of one, nor am I in the least an enemy to cheerfulness and good humour; but I cannot envy you your situation; I even feel myself constrained to prefer the silence of this nook, and the snug fireside in our own diminutive parlour, to all the splendour and gaiety of Brighton.

You ask me, how I feel on the occasion of my approaching publication. Perfectly at my ease. If I had not been pretty well assured before hand that my tranquillity would be but little endangered by such a measure, I would never have engaged in it; for I cannot bear disturbance. I have had in view

two principal objects ; first, to amuse myself,—and secondly, to compass that point in such a manner, that others might possibly be the better for my amusement. If I have succeeded, it will give me pleasure ; but if I have failed, I shall not be mortified to the degree that might perhaps be expected. I remember an old adage, (though not where it is to be found,) “*bene vixit, qui bene latuit*,” and if I had recollected it at the right time, it should have been the motto to my book. By the way, it will make an excellent one for *Retirement*, if you can but tell me whom to quote for it. The critics cannot deprive me of the pleasure I have in reflecting, that so far as my leisure has been employed in writing for the public, it has been conscientiously employed, and with a view to their advantage. There is nothing agreeable, to be sure, in being chronicled for a dunce ; but I believe there lives not a man upon earth who would be less affected by it than myself. With all this indifference to fame, which you know me too well to suppose me capable of affecting, I have taken the utmost pains to deserve it. This may appear a mystery or a paradox in practice, but it is true. I considered that the taste of the day is refined, and delicate to excess, and that to disgust the delicacy of taste, by a slovenly inattention to it, would be to forfeit at once all hope of being useful ; and for this reason, though I have written more verse this last year than perhaps any man in England, I have finished, and polished, and touched, and retouched, with the utmost care. If

after all I should be converted into waste paper, it may be my misfortune, but it will not be my fault. I shall bear it with the most perfect serenity.

I do not mean to give —— a copy: he is a good-natured little man, and crows exactly like a cock, but knows no more of verse than the cock he imitates.

Whoever supposes that Lady Austen's fortune is precarious, is mistaken. I can assure you, upon the ground of the most circumstantial and authentic information, that it is both genteel and perfectly safe.

—Yours,

W. C.

LXX

*To Mrs. Cowper.*

*Oct. 19, 1781.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Your fear lest I should think you unworthy of my correspondence, on account of your delay to answer, may change sides now, and more properly belongs to me. It is long since I received your last, and yet I believe I can say truly, that not a post has gone by me since the receipt of it that has not reminded me of the debt I owe you, for your obliging and unreserved communications both in prose and verse, especially for the latter, because I consider them as marks of your peculiar confidence. The truth is, I have been such a verse-maker myself, and so busy in preparing a volume for the press, which I imagine will make its appearance in the course of the winter, that I hardly



had leisure to listen to the calls of any other engagement. It is however finished, and gone to the printer's, and I have nothing now to do with it, but to correct the sheets as they are sent to me, and consign it over to the judgement of the public. It is a bold undertaking at this time of day, when so many writers of the greatest abilities have gone before, who seem to have anticipated every valuable subject, as well as all the graces of poetical embellishment, to step forth into the world in the character of a bard, especially when it is considered, that luxury, idleness, and vice, have debauched the public taste, and that nothing hardly is welcome but childish fiction, or what has at least a tendency to excite a laugh. I thought, however, that I had stumbled upon some subjects, that had never before been poetically treated, and upon some others, to which I imagined it would not be difficult to give an air of novelty by the manner of treating them. My sole drift is to be useful; a point which however I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh, before they will be called upon to correct that levity, and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it alone in His hands, who can alone produce it: neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and

made efficacious by the power who superintends the truth he has vouchsafed to impart.

You made my heart ache with a sympathetic sorrow, when you described the state of your mind on occasion of your late visit into Hertfordshire. Had I been previously informed of your journey before you made it, I should have been able to have foretold all your feelings with the most unerring certainty of prediction. You will never cease to feel upon that subject ; but with your principles of resignation, and acquiescence in the divine will, you will always feel as becomes a Christian. We are forbidden to murmur, but we are not forbidden to regret ; and whom we loved tenderly while living we may still pursue with an affectionate remembrance, without having any occasion to charge ourselves with rebellion against the sovereignty that appointed a separation. A day is coming when I am confident you will see and know, that mercy to both parties was the principal agent in a scene, the recollection of which is still painful.

W. C.

LXXI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Nov. 24, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

News is always acceptable, especially from another world. I cannot tell you what has been done in the

Chesapeake, but I can tell you what has passed at West Wycombe, in this county. Do you feel yourself disposed to give credit to the story of an apparition? No, say you. I am of your mind. I do not believe more than one in a hundred of those tales with which old women frighten children, and teach children to frighten each other. But you are not such a philosopher, I suppose, as to have persuaded yourself that an apparition is an impossible thing. You can attend to a story of that sort, if well authenticated? Yes. Then I can tell you one.

You have heard, no doubt, of the romantic friendship that subsisted once between Paul Whitehead, and Lord le Despenser, the late Sir Francis Dashwood.—When Paul died, he left his lordship a legacy. It was his heart, which was taken out of his body, and sent as directed. His friend having built a church, and at that time just finished it, used it as a mausoleum upon this occasion; and having (as I think the newspapers told us at the time) erected an elegant pillar in the centre of it, on the summit of this pillar, enclosed in a golden urn, he placed the heart in question. But not as a lady places a china figure upon her mantel-tree, or on the top of her cabinet, but with much respectful ceremony, and all the forms of funeral solemnity. He hired the best singers and best performers. He composed an anthem for the purpose, he invited all the nobility and gentry in the country to assist at the celebration of these obsequies, and having formed them all into an august procession, marched to the

place appointed at their head, and consigned the posthumous treasure, with his own hands, to its state of honourable elevation. Having thus, as he thought, (and as he might well think, for it seems they were both renowned for their infidelity, and if they had any religion at all were pagans,) appeased the manes of the deceased, he rested satisfied with what he had done, and supposed his friend would rest. But not so ;—about a week since, I received a letter from a person, who cannot have been misinformed, telling me that Paul has appeared frequently of late to his Lordship, who labours under a complication of distempers,—that it is supposed the shock he has suffered from such unexpected visits will make his recovery, which was before improbable, impossible. Nor is this all : to ascertain the fact, and to put it out of the power of scepticism to argue away the reality of it, there are few, if any, of his lordship's numerous household, who have not likewise seen him, sometimes in the park, sometimes in the garden, as well as in the house, by day and by night, indifferently. I make no reflections upon this incident, having other things to write about, and but little room.

I am much indebted to Mr. Smith for more franks, and still more obliged by the handsome note with which he accompanied them. He has furnished me sufficiently for the present occasion, and by his readiness, and obliging manner of doing it, encouraged me to have recourse to him, in case another exigence of the same kind should offer. A French author I was



reading last night says, He that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume. At present, however, I do not feel myself so disposed; and, indeed, he that would write, should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own. I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. But enough of this.

Your mother, who is as well as the season of the year will permit, desires me to add her love. The salmon you sent us arrived safe, and was remarkably fresh. What a comfort it is to have a friend who knows that we love salmon, and who cannot pass by a fishmonger's shop, without finding his desire to send



us some, a temptation too strong to be resisted!—  
Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## LXXII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Nov. 26, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I wrote to you by the last post, supposing you at Stock; but lest that letter should not follow you to Laytonstone, and you should suspect me of unreasonable delay, and lest the frank you have sent me should degenerate into waste paper, and perish upon my hands, I write again. The former letter, however, containing all my present stock of intelligence, it is more than possible that this may prove a blank, or but little worthy of your acceptance. You will do me the justice to suppose, that if I could be very entertaining, I would be so, because, by giving me credit for such a willingness to please, you only allow me a share of that universal vanity, which inclines every man, upon all occasions, to exhibit himself to the best advantage. To say the truth, however, when I write, as I do to you, not about business, nor on any subject that approaches to that description, I mean much less my correspondent's amusement, which my modesty will not always permit me to hope for, than my own. There is a pleasure annexed to the communication of one's ideas, whether by word of mouth, or by letter, which nothing earthly can supply the place of, and it

is the delight we find in this mutual intercourse, that not only proves us to be creatures intended for social life, but more than any thing else perhaps fits us for it.—I have no patience with philosophers ;—they, one and all, suppose (at least I understand it to be a prevailing opinion among them) that man's weakness, his necessities, his inability to stand alone, have furnished the prevailing motive, under the influence of which he renounced at first a life of solitude, and became a gregarious creature. It seems to me more reasonable, as well as more honourable to my species, to suppose, that generosity of soul, and a brotherly attachment to our own kind, drew us, as it were, to one common centre, taught us to build cities, and inhabit them, and welcome every stranger, that would cast in his lot amongst us, that we might enjoy fellowship with each other, and the luxury of reciprocal endearments, without which a paradise could afford no comfort. There are indeed all sorts of characters in the world ; there are some whose understandings are so sluggish, and whose hearts are such mere clods, that they live in society without either contributing to the sweets of it, or having any relish for them.—A man of this stamp passes by our window continually ; he draws patterns for the lace makers ; I never saw him conversing with a neighbour but once in my life, though I have known him by sight these twelve years ; he is of a very sturdy make, has a round belly, extremely protuberant, which he evidently considers as his best friend, because it is his only companion, and it is the

labour of his life to fill it. I can easily conceive, that it is merely the love of good eating and drinking, and now and then the want of a new pair of shoes, that attaches this man so much to the neighbourhood of his fellow mortals; for suppose these exigencies, and others of a like kind, to subsist no longer, and what is there that could possibly give society the preference in his esteem? He might strut about with his two thumbs upon his hips in a wilderness; he could hardly be more silent than he is at Olney, and for any advantage, or comfort, or friendship, or brotherly affection, he could not be more destitute of such blessings there, than in his present situation. But other men have something more than guts to satisfy; there are the yearnings of the heart, which, let philosophers say what they will, are more importunate than all the necessities of the body, that will not suffer a creature, worthy to be called human, to be content with an insulated life, or to look for his friends among the beasts of the forest. Yourself for instance! It is not because there are no tailors or pastry-cooks to be found upon Salisbury Plain, that you do not choose it for your abode, but because you are a philanthropist,—because you are susceptible of social impressions, and have a pleasure in doing a kindness when you can.—Witness the salmon you sent, and the salmon you still mean to send; to which your mother wishes you to add a handful of prawns, not only because she likes them, but because they agree with her so well that she even finds them medicinal.

Now upon the word of a poor creature, I have said all that I have said, without the least intention to say one word of it when I began. But thus it is with my thoughts :—when you shake a crab-tree, the fruit falls ; good for nothing indeed when you have got it, but still the best that is to be expected from a crab-tree. You are welcome to them, such as they are, and if you approve my sentiments, tell the philosophers of the day, that I have outshot them all, and have discovered the true origin of society, when I least looked for it.

We should be glad to receive this fresh proof of your regard, viz. the additional piece of salmon, at any time before Christmas.

### LXXIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Dec. 4, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The present to the Queen of France, and the piece addressed to Sir Joshua Reynolds, my only two political efforts, being of the predictive kind, and both falsified, or likely to be so, by the miscarriage of the royal cause in America, were already condemned when I received your last. I have a poetical epistle which I wrote last summer, and another poem not yet finished, in stanzas, with which I mean to supply their places. Henceforth I have done with politics. The stage of national affairs is such a fluctuating



scene, that an event which appears probable to-day becomes impossible to-morrow; and unless a man were indeed a prophet, he cannot, but with the greatest hazard of losing his labour, bestow his rhymes upon future contingencies, which perhaps are never to take place but in his own wishes and in the reveries of his own fancy. I learned when I was a boy, being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavours. Prior's pieces of that sort were recommended to my particular notice; and as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and I think some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples, and while I lived in the Temple produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to be popular. What we learn in childhood we retain long; and the successes we met with, about three years ago, when D'Estaing was twice repulsed, once in America, and once in the West Indies, having set fire to my patriotic zeal once more, it discovered itself by the same symptoms, and produced effects much like those it had produced before. But, unhappily, the ardour I felt upon the occasion, disdaining to be



confined within the bounds of fact, pushed me upon uniting the prophetic with the poetical character, and defeated its own purpose. I am glad it did. The less there is of that sort in my book the better; it will be more consonant to your character, who patronise the volume, and, indeed, to the constant tenor of my own thoughts upon public matters, that I should exhort my countrymen to repentance, than that I should flatter their pride—that vice for which, perhaps, they are even now so severely punished.

I subjoin the lines with which I mean to supersede the obnoxious ones in *Expostulation*. If it should lie fairly in your way to do it, I will beg of you to deliver them to Johnson, and at the same time to strike your pen through the offensive passage. I ask it merely because it will save a frank, but not unless you can do it without inconvenience to yourself. The new paragraph consists exactly of the same number of lines with the old one, for upon this occasion I worked like a tailor when he sews a patch upon a hole in your coat, supposing it might be necessary to do so. Upon second thoughts I will enclose the lines instead of adding them *ad calcem*, that I may save you the trouble of a transcript.

We are glad, for Mr. Barham's sake, that he has been so happily disappointed. How little does the world suspect what passes in it every day!—that true religion is working the same wonders now as in the first ages of the church,—that parents surrender up their children into the hands of God, to die at his

own appointed moment, and by what death he pleases, without a murmur, and receive them again as if by a resurrection from the dead! The world, however, would be more justly chargeable with wilful blindness than it is, if all professors of the truth exemplified its power in their conduct as conspicuously as Mr. Barham.

Easterly winds, and a state of confinement within our own walls, suit neither me nor Mrs. Unwin; though we are both, to use the Irish term, rather unwell than ill. The cocoa nut, though it had not a drop of liquor in it, and though the kernel came out whole, entirely detached from the shell, was an exceeding good one. Our hearts are with you.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Mrs. Madan is happy. She will be found ripe, fall when she may.

We are sorry you speak doubtfully about a spring visit to Olney. Those doubts must not outlive the winter.

#### LXXIV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

Dec. 9, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having returned you many thanks for the fine cod and oysters you favoured me with, though it is now morning I will suppose it afternoon, that you and I

dined together, are comfortably situated by a good fire, and just entering on a sociable conversation. You speak first, because I am a man of few words.

Well, Cowper, what do you think of this American war?

*I.* To say the truth I am not very fond of thinking about it; when I do I think of it, unpleasantly enough. I think it bids fair to be the ruin of the country.

*You.* That's very unpleasant indeed! If that should be the consequence, it will be the fault of those who might put a stop to it if they would.

*I.* But do you really think that practicable?

*You.* Why not? If people leave off fighting, peace follows of course. I wish they would withdraw the forces and put an end to the squabble.

Now I am going to make a long speech.

*I.* You know the complexion of my sentiments upon some subjects well enough, and that I do not look upon public events either as fortuitous, or absolutely derivable either from the wisdom or folly of man. These indeed operate as second causes; but we must look for the cause of the decline or the prosperity of an empire elsewhere. I have long since done complaining of men and measures, having learned to consider them merely as the instruments of a higher Power, by which he either bestows wealth, peace, and dignity upon a nation when he favours it; or by which he strips it of all those honours, when public enormities long persisted in provoke him to inflict a public punishment. The counsels of great men become as foolish

and preposterous when he is pleased to make them so, as those of the frantic creatures in Bedlam, when they lay their distracted heads together to consider of the state of the nation. But I go still farther. The wisdom, or the want of wisdom, that we observe or think we observe in those that rule us, entirely out of the question, I cannot look upon the circumstances of this country, without being persuaded that I discern in them an entanglement and perplexity that I have never met with in the history of any other, which I think preternatural (if I may use the word on such a subject), prodigious in its kind, and such as human sagacity can never remedy. I have a good opinion of the understanding and integrity of some in power, yet I see plainly that they are unequal to the task. I think as favourably of some that are not in power, yet I am sure they have never yet in any of their speeches recommended the plan that would effect the salutary purpose. If we pursue the war, it is because we are desperate; it is plunging and sinking year after year into still greater depths of calamity. If we relinquish it, the remedy is equally desperate, and would prove I believe in the end no remedy at all. Either way we are undone. Perseverance will only enfeeble us more; we cannot recover the colonies by arms. If we discontinue the attempt, in that case we fling away voluntarily what in the other we strive ineffectually to regain; and whether we adopt the one measure or the other, are equally undone: for I consider the loss of America as the ruin of England. Were we less

encumbered than we are at home, we could but ill afford it ; but being crushed as we are under an enormous debt that the public credit can at no rate carry much longer, the consequence is sure. Thus it appears to me that we are squeezed to death, between the two sides of that sort of alternative which is commonly called a cleft stick, the most threatening and portentous condition in which the interests of any country can possibly be found.

I think I have done pretty well for a man of few words, and have contrived to have all the talk to myself. I thank you for not interrupting me.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

LXXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Jan. 5, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Did I allow myself to plead the common excuse of idle correspondents, and esteem it a sufficient reason for not writing, that I have nothing to write about, I certainly should not write now. But I have so often found, on similar occasions, when a great penury of matter has seemed to threaten me with an utter impossibility of hatching a letter, that nothing is necessary but to put pen to paper, and go on, in order to conquer all difficulties,—that, availing myself of past experience, I now begin with a most assured



persuasion, that sooner or later, one idea naturally suggesting another, I shall come to a most prosperous conclusion.

In the last *Review*, I mean in the last but one, I saw Johnson's critique upon Prior and Pope. I am bound to acquiesce in his opinion of the latter, because it has always been my own. I could never agree with those who preferred him to Dryden ; nor with others, (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too,) who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct ; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, but so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such, (at least sometimes,) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal. So far, therefore, I have no quarrel with Johnson. But I cannot subscribe to what he says of Prior. In the first place, though

my memory may fail me, I do not recollect that he takes any notice of his *Solomon*; in my mind the best poem, whether we consider the subject of it, or the execution, that he ever wrote. In the next place, he condemns him for introducing Venus and Cupid into his love-verses, and concludes it impossible his passion could be sincere, because when he would express it he has recourse to fables. But when Prior wrote, those deities were not so obsolete as now. His contemporary writers, and some that succeeded him, did not think them beneath their notice. Tibullus, in reality, disbelieved their existence as much as we do; yet Tibullus is allowed to be the prince of all poetical innamoratos, though he mentions them in almost every page. There is a fashion in these things, which the Doctor seems to have forgotten. But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon *Henry and Emma*? I agree with him, that morally considered both the knight and his lady are bad characters, and that each exhibits an example which ought not to be followed. The man dissembles in a way that would have justified the woman had she renounced him; and the woman resolves to follow him at the expense of delicacy, propriety, and even modesty itself. But when the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with

the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects, and to have given it a consecrated place in their memories, without ever feeling it a burthen. I wonder almost, that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys and girls do not tear this husky, dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life,<sup>1</sup> he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification.

The next packet I receive will bring me, I imagine, the last proof sheet of my volume, which will consist of about three hundred and fifty pages honestly printed. My public *entrée* therefore is not far distant.

Had we known that the last cheeses were naught, we would not have sent you these. Your mother has however enquired for and found a better dairy, which she means shall furnish you with cheese another year.—Yours,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> When he wrote thus, Cowper did not, and indeed could not, know what a fond and faithful husband Johnson had been to his Tetty. It was only the publication of Boswell's life which revealed to the world, what perhaps none could have suspected from his writings, the depth of tenderness of Johnson's affectionate heart.

## LXXVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Jan. 17, 1782.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I am glad we agree in our opinion of King Critic, and the writers on whom he has bestowed his animadversions. It is a matter of indifference to me whether I think with the world at large or not, but I wish my friends to be of my mind. The same work will wear a different appearance in the eyes of the same man according to the different views with which he reads it; if merely for his amusement, his candour being in less danger of a twist from interest or prejudice, he is pleased with what is really pleasing, and is not over curious to discover a blemish, because the exercise of a minute exactness is not consistent with his purpose. But if he once becomes a critic by trade, the case is altered. He must then at any rate establish, if he can, an opinion in every mind, of his uncommon discernment, and his exquisite taste. This great end he can never accomplish by thinking in the track that has been beaten under the hoof of public judgement. He must endeavour to convince the world, that their favourite authors have more faults than they are aware of, and such as they have never suspected. Having marked out a writer universally esteemed, whom he finds it for that very reason convenient to depreciate and traduce, he will overlook some of his beauties, he will faintly praise others, and in such a manner as to

make thousands, more modest, though quite as judicious as himself, question whether they are beauties at all. Can there be a stronger illustration of all that I have said, than the severity of Johnson's remarks upon Prior, I might have said the injustice? His reputation as an author who, with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease, stood unshaken till Johnson thrust his head against it. And how does he attack him in this his principal fort? I cannot recollect his very words, but I am much mistaken indeed if my memory fails me with respect to the purport of them. "His words," he says, "appear to be forced into their proper places; there indeed we find them, but find likewise that their arrangement has been the effect of constraint, and that without violence they would certainly have stood in a different order." By your leave, most learned Doctor, this is the most disingenuous remark I ever met with, and would have come with a better grace from Curl or Dennis. Every man conversant with verse-writing knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic,—to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could



accomplish this task was Prior ; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original. And now to tell us, after we and our fathers have admired him for it so long, that he is an easy writer indeed, but that his ease has an air of stiffness in it, in short, that his ease is not ease, but only something like it, what is it but a self-contradiction, an observation that grants what it is just going to deny, and denies what it has just granted, in the same sentence, and in the same breath ? But I have filled the greatest part of my sheet with a very uninteresting subject. I will only say, that as a nation we are not much indebted, in point of poetical credit, to this too sagacious and unmerciful judge ; and that for myself in particular, I have reason to rejoice that he entered upon and exhausted the labours of his office before my poor volume could possibly become an object of them. By the way, you cannot have a book at the time you mention ; I have lived a fortnight or more in expectation of the last sheet, which is not yet arrived.

You have already furnished John's memory with by far the greatest part of what a parent would wish to store it with. If all that is merely trivial, and all that has an immoral tendency, were expunged from our English poets, how would they shrink, and how would some of them completely vanish ! I believe there are some of Dryden's *Fables* which he would find very entertaining ; they are for the most part fine compositions, and not above his apprehension ; but Dryden

has written few things that are not blotted here and there with an unchaste allusion, so that you must pick his way for him, lest he should tread in the dirt. You did not mention Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, which I remember being so charmed with when I was a boy that I was never weary of them. There are even passages in the paradisiacal part of the *Paradise Lost*, which he might study with advantage. And to teach him, as you can, to deliver some of the fine orations made in the Pandæmonium, and those between Satan, Ithuriel, and Zephon, with emphasis, dignity, and propriety, might be of great use to him hereafter. The sooner the ear is formed, and the organs of speech are accustomed to the various inflections of the voice, which the rehearsal of those passages demands, the better. I should think too, that Thomson's *Seasons* might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing and a philosophical turn. I do not forget that he is but a child. But I remember that he is a child favoured with talents superior to his years. We were much pleased with his remarks on your almsgiving, and doubt not but it will be verified with respect to the two guineas you sent us, which have made four Christian people happy. Ships I have none, nor have touched a pencil these three years; if ever I take it up again, which I rather suspect I shall not (the employment requiring stronger eyes than mine), it shall be at John's service.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## LXXVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

The modest terms in which you express yourself on the subject of Lady Austen's commendation embolden me to add my suffrage to hers, and to confirm it by assuring you that I think her just and well founded in her opinion of you. The compliment indeed glances at myself; for were you less than she accounts you, I ought not to afford you that place in my esteem which you have held so long. My own sagacity therefore and discernment are not a little concerned upon the occasion, for either you resemble the picture, or I have strangely mistaken my man, and formed an erroneous judgement of his character. With respect to your face and figure indeed, there I leave the ladies to determine, as being naturally best qualified to decide the point; but whether you are perfectly the man of sense, and the gentleman, is a question in which I am as much interested as they, and which, you being my friend, I am of course prepared to settle in your favour. The lady (whom, when you know her as well, you will love as much as we do) is, and has been during the last fortnight, a part of our family. Before she was perfectly restored to health, she returned to Clifton. Soon after she came back, Mr. Jones had occasion to go to London. No sooner was he gone, than the *Chateau*, being left without a garrison,

was besieged as regularly as the night came on. Villains were both heard and seen in the garden, and at the doors and windows. The kitchen window in particular was attempted, from which they took a complete pane of glass, exactly opposite to the iron by which it was fastened; but providentially the window had been nailed to the wood-work, in order to keep it close, and that the air might be excluded; thus they were disappointed, and being discovered by the maid, withdrew. The ladies being worn out with continual watching, and repeated alarms, were at last prevailed upon to take refuge with us. Men furnished with firearms were put into the house, and the rascals, having intelligence of this circumstance, beat a retreat. Mr. Jones returned; Mrs. Jones and Miss Green, her daughter, left us, but Lady Austen's spirits having been too much disturbed, to be able to repose in a place where she had been so much terrified, she was left behind. She remains with us till her lodgings at the vicarage can be made ready for her reception. I have now sent you what has occurred of moment in our history since my last.

I say amen, with all my heart, to your observation on religious characters. Men who profess themselves adepts in mathematical knowledge, in astronomy, or jurisprudence, are generally as well qualified as they would appear. The reason may be, that they are always liable to detection, should they attempt to impose upon mankind, and therefore take care to be what they pretend. In religion alone, a profession is



often slightly taken up, and slovenly carried on, because forsooth candour and charity require us to hope the best, and to judge favourably of our neighbour, and because it is easy to deceive the ignorant, who are a great majority, upon this subject. Let a man attach himself to a particular party, contend furiously for what are properly called evangelical doctrines, and enlist himself under the banner of some popular preacher, and the business is done. Behold a Christian! a Saint! a Phoenix!—In the mean time perhaps his heart, and his temper, and even his conduct, are unsanctified; possibly less exemplary than those of some avowed infidels. No matter!—he can talk,—he has the Shibboleth of the true church,—the Bible in his pocket, and a head well stored with notions. But the quiet, humble, modest, and peaceable person, who is in his practice what the other is only in his profession, who hates a noise, and therefore makes none, who knowing the snares that are in the world, keeps himself as much out of it as he can, and never enters it, but when duty calls, and even then with fear and trembling, is the Christian that will always stand highest in the estimation of those, who bring all characters to the test of true wisdom, and judge of the tree by its fruit.

You are desirous of visiting the prisoners; you wish to administer to their necessities, and to give them instruction. This task you will undertake, though you expect to encounter many things in the performance of it, that will give you pain. Now *this* I



can understand ;—you will not listen to the sensibilities that distress yourself, but to the distresses of others. Therefore, when I meet with one of the specious praters above-mentioned, I will send him to Stock, that by your diffidence he may be taught a lesson of modesty ; by your generosity, a little feeling for others ; and by your general conduct, in short, to chatter less, and to do more.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

LXXVIII

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Jan. 31, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having thanked you for a barrel of very fine oysters, I should have nothing more to say, if I did not determine to say every thing that may happen to occur. The political world affords us no very agreeable subjects at present, nor am I sufficiently conversant with it, to do justice to so magnificent a theme, if it did. A man that lives as I do, whose chief occupation, at this season of the year, is to walk ten times in a day from the fireside to his cucumber frame and back again, cannot show his wisdom more, if he has any wisdom to show, than by leaving the mysteries of government to the management of persons, in point of situation and information, much better qualified for the business. Suppose not, however, that I am perfectly an unconcerned spectator, or that I take no

interest at all in the affairs of my country ; far from it—I read the news—I see that things go wrong in every quarter. I meet, now and then, with an account of some disaster that seems to be the indisputable progeny of treachery, cowardice, or a spirit of faction ; I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician ; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject, without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought me the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy ! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture, when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec. I am not, therefore, I suppose destitute of true patriotism, but the course of public events has, of late, afforded me no opportunity to exert it. I cannot rejoice, because I see no reason, and I will not murmur, because for that I can find no good one. And let me add, he that has seen both sides of fifty, has lived to little purpose, if he has not other views of the world than he had when he was much younger. He finds, if he reflects at all, that it will be to the end, what it has been from the beginning, a shifting, uncertain, fluctuating scene ; that nations, as well as individuals, have their seasons of infancy, youth, and age. If he be an Englishman, he will observe that

ours, in particular, is affected with every symptom of decay, and is already sunk into a state of decrepitude. I am reading Mrs. M'Aulay's *History*. I am not quite such a superannuated simpleton, as to suppose that mankind were wiser or much better, when I was young, than they are now. But I may venture to assert, without exposing myself to the charge of dotage, that the men whose integrity, courage, and wisdom, broke the bands of tyranny, established our constitution upon its true basis, and gave a people, overwhelmed with the scorn of all countries, an opportunity to emerge into a state of the highest respect and estimation, make a better figure in history than any of the present day are likely to do, when their pretty harangues are forgotten, and nothing shall survive but the remembrance of the views and motives with which they made them.

My dear friend, I have written at random, in every sense, neither knowing what sentiments I should broach, when I began, nor whether they would accord with yours. Excuse a rustic, if he errs on such a subject, and believe me sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

## LXXIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Feb. 9, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I thank you for Mr. Lowth's verses. They are so

good, that had I been present when he spoke them, I should have trembled for the boy, lest the man should disappoint the hopes such early genius had given birth to. It is not common to see so lively a fancy so correctly managed, and so free from irregular exuberances, at so unexperienced an age ; fruitful, yet not wanton, and gay without being tawdry. When school-boys write verse, if they have any fire at all, it generally spends itself in flashes, and transient sparks, which may indeed suggest an expectation of something better hereafter, but deserve not to be much commended for any real merit of their own. Their wit is generally forced and false, and their sublimity, if they affect any, bombast. I remember well when it was thus with me, and when a turgid, noisy, unmeaning speech in a tragedy, which I should now laugh at, afforded me raptures, and filled me with wonder. It is not in general till reading and observation have settled the taste, that we can give the prize to the best writing, in preference to the worst. Much less are we able to execute what is good ourselves. But Lowth seems to have stepped into excellence at once, and to have gained by intuition, what we little folks are happy, if we can learn at last, after much labour of our own, and instruction of others. The compliments he pays to the memory of King Charles, he would probably now retract, though he be a Bishop, and his Majesty's zeal for episcopacy was one of the causes of his ruin. An age or two must pass, before some characters can be properly understood. The spirit of party employs

itself in veiling their faults, and ascribing to them virtues which they never possessed. See Charles's face drawn by Clarendon, and it is a handsome portrait. See it more justly exhibited by Mrs. Macaulay, and it is deformed to a degree that shocks us. Every feature expresses cunning, employing itself in the attainment of tyranny; and dissimulation, pretending itself an advocate for truth.

I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship, disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it.

My letters have already apprized you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Ann Street,<sup>1</sup> and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother,

<sup>1</sup> Lady Austen.



proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it: conscious of none but the most upright inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time, but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end, but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence; it received indeed an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience

of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion, and seriousness of mind, (for with all that gaiety, she is a great thinker,) induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister.—*Ceu fumus in auras.*

I thank you for the search you have made after my intended motto, but I no longer need it. I have left myself no room for politics, that subject therefore must be postponed to a future letter. Our love is always with yourself and family. We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the fracas above mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprize you of this quarrel sooner, but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## LXXX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 6, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The tempting occasion of a basket directed to you, seldom fails to produce a letter; not that I have any thing to say, but because I can say any thing, therefore I seize the present opportunity to address you. Some subject will be sure to present itself, and the first that offers shall be welcome.

Is peace the nearer because our patriots have resolved that it is desirable? Will the victory they have gained in the House of Commons be attended with any other consequences than the mortification of the King, the embarrassment of ministry, and perhaps Lord North's resignation? Do they expect the same success on other occasions, and having once gained a majority, are they to be the majority for ever?—These are the questions we agitate by the fireside in an evening, without being able to come to any certain conclusion, partly I suppose because the subject is in itself uncertain, and partly because we are not furnished with the means of understanding it. I find the politics of times past far more intelligible than those of the present. Time has thrown light upon what was obscure, and decided what was ambiguous. The characters of great men, which are always mysterious while they live, are ascertained by the faithful historian, and sooner or later receive their wages of fame or infamy, according to their

true deserts. How have I seen sensible and learned men burn incense to the memory of Oliver Cromwell, ascribing to him, as the greatest hero of the world, the dignity of the British empire during the interregnum. A century passed before that idol, which seemed to be of gold, was proved to be a wooden one. The fallacy however was at length detected, and the honour of that detection has fallen to the share of a woman. I do not know whether you have read Mrs. Macaulay's history of that period. She handled him more roughly than the Scots did at the battle of Dunbar, where, though he gained a victory, he received a wound in his head, that had almost made it his last, and spoiled him for a Protector. He would have thought it little worth his while to have broken through all obligations divine and human, to have wept crocodile tears, and wrapped himself up in the obscurity of speeches that nobody could understand, could he have foreseen that in the ensuing century a lady's scissors would clip his laurels close, and expose his naked villany to the scorn of all posterity. This however has been accomplished, and so effectually, that I suppose it is not in the power of the most artificial management to make them grow again. Even the sagacious of mankind are blind when Providence leaves them be deluded ; so blind, that a tyrant shall be mistaken for a true patriot, true patriots (such were the Long Parliament) shall be abhorred as tyrants, and almost a whole nation shall dream, that they have the full enjoyment of liberty, for years after such a

crafty knave as Oliver shall have stolen it completely from them. I am indebted for all this show of historical knowledge to Mr. Bull, who has lent me five volumes of the work I mention. I was willing to display it while I have it; in a twelvemonth's time I shall remember almost nothing of the matter.

I wrote to Lord Dartmouth to apprise him of my intended present, and have received a very affectionate and obliging answer. But not having received the volume myself, I suppose it is not yet published, though the first of the month was the day fixed for the publication.

No winter since we knew Olney has kept us more closely confined than the present; either the ways have been so dirty or the weather so rough, that we have not more than three times escaped into the fields, since last autumn. This does not suit Mrs. Unwin, to whom air and exercise, her only remedies, are almost absolutely necessary. Neither are my frequent calls into the garden altogether sufficient for me. Man, a changeable creature himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety, as his proper element. A melancholy man at least is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walls, and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually.

Mrs. Unwin hopes the chickens will prove good, though not so fat as she generally makes them. She has sent the two guineas for the box, and I the layers and pinks I mentioned. When the bulbs are taken



up at Michaelmas, Mrs. Newton shall receive a parcel of all the sorts. Though I have spoken of the utility of changes, we neither feel nor wish for any in our friendships, and consequently stand just where we did with respect to your whole self. Other friends than you we have none, nor expect any.—Yours, my dear Sir,

WM. COWPER.

The cocoa nuts were equally good, and one of the tongues proved a very fine one; we have not dressed the other.

LXXXI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*March 7, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We have great pleasure in the contemplation of your Northern journey, as it promises us a sight of you and yours by the way, and are only sorry that Miss Shuttleworth cannot be of the party. A line to ascertain the hour when we may expect you, by the next preceding post, will be welcome.

We are far from wishing a renewal of the connexion<sup>1</sup> we have lately talked about. We did indeed find it in a certain way an agreeable one while that lady continued in the country, yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan, with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceed-

<sup>1</sup> With Lady Austen.

ingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression, but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us ; occasionally perhaps it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us, whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not ; or rather whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude ; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think however that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to a disadvantage ; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural, her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have

hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology.

It is not much for my advantage, that the printer delays so long to gratify your expectation. It is a state of mind that is apt to tire and disconcert us ; and there are but few pleasures that make us amends for the pain of repeated disappointment. I take it for granted you have not received the volume, not having received it myself, nor indeed heard from Johnson, since he fixed the first of the month for its publication.

What a medley are our public prints, half the page filled with the ruin of the country, and the other half filled with the vices and pleasures of it ;—here an island taken, and there a new comedy ;—here an empire lost, and there an Italian opera, or the Duke of Gloucester's rout on a Sunday !

“ May it please your R. H. ! I am an Englishman, and must stand or fall with the nation. Religion, its true Palladium, has been stolen away ; and it is crumbling into dust. Sin ruins us, the sins of the great especially, and of their sins especially the violation of the sabbath, because it is naturally productive of all the rest. Is it fit that a Prince should make the sabbath a day of dissipation, and that not content with his own personal profanation of it, he should invite all whose rank entitles them to the honour of such distinction, to partake with him in his guilt ?

Are examples operative in proportion to the dignity of those who set them? Whose then more pernicious than your own in this flagrant instance of impiety? For shame, Sir!—if you wish well to your brother's arms, and would be glad to see the kingdom emerging again from her ruins, pay more respect to an ordinance that deserves the deepest! I do not say pardon this short remonstrance!—The concern I feel for my country, and the interest I have in its prosperity, give me a right to make it.—I am, &c.”

Thus one might write to his Highness, and (I suppose) might be as profitably employed in whistling the tune of an old ballad. Lord P—— had a rout too on the same day.—Is he the son of that P——, who bought Punch for a hundred pounds, and having kept him a week, tore him limb from limb because he was sullen and would not speak?—Probably he is.

I have no copy of the Preface, nor do I know at present how Johnson and Mr. Newton have settled it. In the matter of it there was nothing offensively peculiar. But it was thought too pious.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## LXXXII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*March 18, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Nothing has given me so much pleasure, since the

publication of my volume, as your favourable opinion of it. It may possibly meet with acceptance from hundreds, whose commendation would afford me no other satisfaction than what I should find in the hope that it might do them good. I have some neighbours in this place, who say they like it ;—doubtless I had rather they should than that they should not,—but I know them to be persons of no more taste in poetry, than skill in the mathematics ; their applause therefore is a sound that has no music in it for me. But my vanity was not so entirely quiescent when I read your friendly account of the manner in which it had affected *you*. It was tickled, and pleased, and told me in a pretty loud whisper, that others perhaps of whose taste and judgement I had a high opinion, would approve it too. As a giver of good counsel, I wish to please all ;—as an author, I am perfectly indifferent to the judgement of all, except the few who are indeed judicious. The circumstance however in your letter which pleased me the most was, that you wrote in high spirits, and though you said much, suppressed more, lest you should hurt my delicacy ; my delicacy is obliged to you,—but you observe it is not so squeamish, but that after it has feasted upon praise expressed, it can find a comfortable dessert in the contemplation of praise implied. I now feel as if I should be glad to begin another volume, but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to take at present, and the season of the year brings with it so many avocations into the garden, where I am my own *fac totum*,



that I have little or no leisure for the quill. I should do myself much wrong, were I to omit mentioning the great complacency with which I read your narrative of Mrs. Unwin's smiles and tears; persons of much sensibility are always persons of taste; a taste for poetry depends indeed upon that very article more than upon any other. If she had Aristotle by heart, I should not esteem her judgement so highly, were she defective in point of feeling, as I do and must esteem it, knowing her to have such feelings as Aristotle could not communicate, and as half the readers in the world are destitute of. This it is that makes me set so high a price upon your mother's opinion. She is a critic by nature, and not by rule, and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition, that I never knew deceive her; insomuch, that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for the preference, in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one.

Whether I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not, is at present *in ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so particularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought, that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner as too insignificant for a statesman's notice, and never found till his executor finds them. This affair however is neither *ad* my *libitum* nor his. I

have sent him the truth, and the truth which I know he is ignorant of. He that put it into the heart of a certain eastern monarch, to amuse himself one sleepless night with listening to the records of his kingdom, is able to give birth to such another occasion in Lord Thurlow's instance, and inspire him with a curiosity to know what he has received from a friend he once loved and valued. If an answer comes however, you shall not long be a stranger to the contents of it.

I have read your letter to their Worships, and much approve of it. May it have the effect it ought! If not, still you have acted an humane and becoming part, and the poor aching toes and fingers of the prisoners will not appear in judgement against you. I have made a slight alteration in the last sentence, which perhaps you will not disapprove.—Yours ever,

W. C.

### LXXXIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*April 1, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I could not have found a better trumpeter. Your zeal to serve the interest of my volume, together with your extensive acquaintance, qualify you perfectly for that most useful office. Methinks I see you with the long tube at your mouth, proclaiming to your numerous connexions my poetical merits, and at proper intervals levelling it at Olney, and pouring into my

ear the welcome sound of their approbation. I need not encourage you to proceed, your breath will never fail in such a cause ; and thus encouraged, I myself perhaps may proceed also, and when the versifying fit returns produce another volume. Alas ! we shall never receive such commendations from him on the wool-sack, as your good friend has lavished upon us. He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since that I was going to publish ; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer ; for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was not so much as mentioned : whence I learn two lessons ; first, that however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his ; and secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgement of the favour I have conferred upon his lordship, either under his own hand, or by the means of a third person ; and consequently that our intercourse has ceased for ever, for I shall not have such another opportunity to renew it. To make me amends however for this mortification, Mr. Newton tells me, that my book is likely to run, spread, and prosper ; that the grave cannot help smiling, and the gay are struck with the truth of it ; and that it is likely to find its way into his Majesty's hands, being put into a proper course for that purpose. Now if the King should fall in love with my Muse, and with you for her sake, such an event would make us ample amends for the

Chancellor's indifference, and you might be the first divine that ever reached a mitre from the shoulders of a poet. But, I believe, we must be content, I with my gains, if I gain any thing, and you with the pleasure of knowing that I am a gainer.

Doubt not your abilities for the task which Johnson would recommend to you. The Reviewers are such fiery Socinians that they have less charity for a man of my avowed principles than a Portugeze for a Jew. They may possibly find here and there somewhat to commend, but will undoubtedly reprobate the doctrines, pronounce me a methodist, and by so doing probably check the sale of the volume, if not suppress it. Wherein consists your difficulty? Your private judgement once made public, and the world made acquainted with what you think and what you feel while you read me by the fireside, the business is done, I am reviewed, and my book forwarded in its progress by a judicious recommendation. In return, write a book, and I will be your reviewer; thus we may hold up each other to public admiration, and turn our friendship to good account. But seriously, I think you perfectly qualified for the undertaking; and if you have no other objection to it than what arises from self-distrust, am persuaded you need only make the experiment in order to confute yourself.

We laughed heartily at your reply to little John's question; and yet I think you might have given him a direct answer—"There are various sorts of cleverness, my dear; I do not know that mine lies in the

poetical way, but I can do ten times more towards the entertainment of company in the way of conversation than our friend at Olney. He can rhyme, and I can rattle. If he had my talent, and I had his, we should be too charming, and the world would almost adore us."

I have sowed sallad, in hopes that you will eat it; I have already cut cucumbers, but have no fruit growing at present. Spring onions in abundance. We shall be happy to see you, and hope that nothing will intervene to shorten your stay with us. Our love is with you both, and with all your family. *Bon voyage!*—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

If your short stay in town will afford you an opportunity, I should be glad if you would buy me a genteelish toothpick case. I shall not think half a guinea too much for it; only it must be one that will not easily break. If second-hand, perhaps, it may be the better.

#### LXXXIV

*To the Rev. William Unwin, at the Rev.  
Matthew Powley's, Dewsbury, near Wakefield.*

*April 27, 1782.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

A part of Lord Harrington's new-raised corps have taken up their quarters at Olney since you left us. They have the regimental music with them. The



men have been drawn up this morning upon the Market-hill, and a concert, such as we have not heard these many years, has been performed at no great distance from our window. Your mother and I both thrust our heads into the coldest east wind that ever blew in April, that we might hear them to greater advantage. The band acquitted themselves with taste and propriety, not *blairing*, like trumpeters at a fair, but producing gentle and elegant symphony, such as charmed our ears, and convinced us that no length of time can wear out a taste for harmony ; and that though plays, balls, and masquerades have lost all their power to please us, and we should find them not only insipid but insupportable, yet sweet music is sure to find a corresponding faculty in the soul, a sensibility that lives to the last, which even religion itself does not extinguish. I must pity therefore some good people, (at least some who once were thought such,) who have been fiddled out of all their Christian profession ; and having forsaken the world for a time, have danced into it again with all their might. It is a snare from which I myself should find it difficult to escape, were I much in the way of it.

When we objected to your coming for a single night, it was only in the way of argument, and in hopes to prevail with you to contrive a longer abode with us. But rather than not see you at all, we should be glad of you though but for an hour. If the paths should be clean enough, and we are able to walk, (for you know we cannot ride,) we will endeavour to meet

you in Weston Park. But I mention no particular hour, that I may not lay you under a supposed obligation to be punctual, which might be difficult at the end of so long a journey. Only if the weather be favourable, you shall find us there in the evening. It is winter in the south, perhaps therefore it may be spring at least, if not summer, in the north: for I have read that it is warmest in Greenland when it is coldest here. Be that as it may, we may hope at the latter end of such an April that the first change of wind will improve the season.

We truly sympathised with you in the distresses you found on the northern side of Wakefield. It is well that the fatigue and the fright together were not too much for Mrs. Unwin. What a boor was he you mention! Cursed is he, says the Scripture, that turneth the blind out of his way, . . a curse that, for aught I know, is fierce enough to singe the beard at least of the wretch who refuses to turn the wanderer into it. You will probably preach at Dewsbury the last Sunday, and if you see this dealer in light money, and this uncivilized savage in the congregation, perhaps you may contrive to tell him so.

The curate's simile Latinized:—

*Sors adversa gerit stimulum, sed tendit et alas :  
Pungit, api similis, sed, velut ista, fugit.*

What a dignity there is in the Roman language! and what an idea it gives us of the good sense and masculine mind of the people that spoke it! The same thought which clothed in English seems childish, and

even foolish, assumes a different air in Latin, and makes at least as good an epigram as some of Martial's.

I remember your making an observation, while here, on the subject of parentheses, to which I acceded without limitation ; but a little attention will convince us both, that they are not to be universally condemned. When they abound, and when they are long, they both embarrass the sense, and are a proof that the writer's head is cloudy, that he has not properly arranged his matter, or is not well skilled in the graces of expression. But as parenthesis is ranked by grammarians among the figures of rhetoric, we may suppose they had a reason for conferring that honour upon it. Accordingly we shall find that in the use of some of our finest writers, as well as in the hands of the ancient poets and orators, it has a peculiar elegance, and imparts a beauty which the period would want without it.

*"Hoc nemus, hunc," inquit, "frondoso vertice collem  
(Quis deus incertum est) habitat deus."*

VIR. ÆN. 8.

In this instance, the first that occurred, it is graceful. I have not time to seek for more, nor room to insert them. But your own observation I believe will confirm my opinion. We have thought of you and talked of you every day since you went, and shall till you return. Our love attends yourself and Mrs. Unwin, John the hider of a tea-kettle not yet found, and your hosts at Dewsbury.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## LXXXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*May 27, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Rather ashamed of having been at all dejected by the censure of the Critical Reviewers, who certainly could not read without prejudice a book replete with opinions and doctrines to which they cannot subscribe, I have at present no little occasion to keep a strict guard upon my vanity, lest it should be too much flattered by the following eulogium. I send it you for the reasons I gave when I imparted to you some other anecdotes of a similar kind, while we were together. Our interests in the success of this same volume are so closely united, that you *must* share with me in the praise or blame that attends it ; and sympathising with me under the burthen of injurious treatment, have a right to enjoy with me the cordials I now and then receive, as I happen to meet with more favourable and candid judges.

A merchant, a friend of ours, (you will soon guess him,) sent my *Poems* to one of the first philosophers, one of the most eminent literary characters, as well as one of the most important in the political world, that the present age can boast of. Now perhaps your conjecturing faculties are puzzled, and you begin to ask, "who, where, and what is he? speak out, for I am all impatience." I will not say a word more, the

letter in which he returned his thanks for the present shall speak for him.

PASSY, *May 8, 1782.*

SIR,

I received the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, and am much obliged by your kind present of a book. The relish for reading of poetry had long since left me, but there is something so new in the manner, so easy, and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiments, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once. I beg you to accept my thankful acknowledgements, and to present my respects to the author.

I shall take care to forward the letters to America, and shall be glad of any other opportunity of doing what may be agreeable to you, being with great respect for your character,—Your most obedient humble servant,

B. FRANKLIN.

We may now treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, "Begone for a jackanapes, and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it."

We are glad that you are safe at home again. Could we see at one glance of the eye what is passing every day upon all the roads in the kingdom, how many are terrified and hurt, how many plundered and



abused, we should indeed find reason enough to be thankful for journeys performed in safety, and for deliverance from dangers we are not perhaps even permitted to see. When in some of the high southern latitudes, and in a dark tempestuous night, a flash of lightning discovered to Captain Cook a vessel, which glanced along close by his side, and which, but for the lightning, he must have run foul of, both the danger, and the transient light that showed it, were undoubtedly designed to convey to him this wholesome instruction, that a particular Providence attended him, and that he was not only preserved from evils, of which he had notice, but from many more of which he had no information, or even the least suspicion. What unlikely contingencies may nevertheless take place! How improbable that two ships should dash against each other, in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean, and that steering contrary courses, from parts of the world so immensely distant from each other, they should yet move so exactly in a line as to clash, fill, and go to the bottom, in a sea where all the ships in the world might be so dispersed as that none should see another! Yet this must have happened but for the remarkable interference which he has recorded. The same Providence indeed might as easily have conducted them so wide of each other, that they should never have met at all; but then this lesson would have been lost; at least, the heroic voyager would have encompassed the globe without having had occasion to relate an incident that so naturally suggests it.

I am no more delighted with the season than you are. The absence of the sun, which has graced the spring with much less of his presence than he vouchsafed to the winter, has a very uncomfortable effect upon my frame. I feel an invincible aversion to employment, which I am yet constrained to fly to as my only remedy against something worse. If I do nothing, I am dejected ; if I do any thing, I am weary ; and that weariness is best described by the word lassitude, which is of all weariness in the world the most oppressive. But enough of myself and the weather.

The blow we have struck in the West Indies will, I suppose, be decisive at least for the present year, and so far as that part of our possessions is concerned in the present conflict. But the news-writers, and their correspondents, disgust me, and make me sick. One victory after such a long series of adverse occurrences has filled them with self-conceit, and impertinent boasting ; and while Rodney is almost accounted a methodist, for ascribing his success to Providence, men who have renounced all dependence upon such a friend, without whose assistance nothing can be done, threaten to drive the French out of the sea, laugh at the Spaniards, sneer at the Dutch, and are to carry the world before them. Our enemies are apt to brag, and we deride them for it ; but we can sing as loud as they can, in the same key, and no doubt wherever our papers go, shall be derided in our turn. An Englishman's true glory should be, to do his business well, and say little about it ; but he disgraces himself

when he puffs his prowess as if he had finished his task, when he has but just begun it.—Yours,

W. C.

LXXXVI

*To the Rev. William Bull.*

*June 22, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If reading verse be your delight,  
'Tis mine as much, or more, to write ;  
But what we would, so weak is man,  
Lies oft remote from what we can.  
For instance, at this very time,  
I feel a wish, by cheerful rhyme,  
To soothe my friend, and, had I power,  
To cheat him of an anxious hour ;  
Not meaning, (for, I must confess,  
It were but folly to suppress,)  
His pleasure or his good alone,  
But squinting partly at my own.  
But though the sun is flaming high  
In the centre of yon arch, the sky,  
And he had once (and who but he ?)  
The name for setting genius free,  
Yet whether poets of past days  
Yielded him undeserved praise,  
And he by no uncommon lot  
Was famed for virtues he had not ;  
Or whether, which is like enough,  
His Highness may have taken huff,

So seldom sought with invocation,  
 Since it has been the reigning fashion  
 To disregard his inspiration,

}

I seem no brighter in my wits,  
 For all the radiance he emits,  
 Than if I saw, through midnight vapour,  
 The glimmering of a farthing taper.  
 Oh for a succedaneum, then,  
 To accelerate a creeping pen !  
 Oh for a ready succedaneum,  
*Quod caput, cerebrum, et cranium*  
*Pondere liberet exoso,*  
*Et morbo jam caliginoso !*

'Tis here ; this oval box well fill'd  
 With best tobacco, finely mill'd,  
 Beats all Anticyra's pretences  
 To disengage the encumber'd senses.

Oh Nymph of Transatlantic fame,  
 Where'er thine haunt, whate'er thy name,  
 Whether reposing on the side  
 Of Oroonoquo's spacious tide,  
 Or listening with delight not small  
 To Niagara's distant fall,  
 'Tis thine to cherish and to feed  
 The pungent nose-refreshing weed,  
 Which, whether pulverized it gain  
 A speedy passage to the brain,  
 Or whether, touch'd with fire, it rise  
 In circling eddies to the skies,  
 Does thought more quicken and refine

Than all the breath of all the Nine ;  
Forgive the bard, if bard he be,  
Who once too wantonly made free,  
To touch with a satiric wipe  
That symbol of thy power, the pipe ;  
So may no blight infest thy plains,  
And no unseasonable rains ;  
And so may smiling peace once more  
Visit America's sad shore ;  
And thou, secure from all alarms,  
Of thundering drums, and glittering arms,  
Rove unconfined beneath the shade  
Thy wide-expanded leaves have made ;  
So may thy votaries increase,  
And fumigation never cease.  
May Newton with renew'd delights  
Perform thine odoriferous rites,  
While clouds of incense half divine  
Involve thy disappearing shrine ;  
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull  
Be always filling, never full.

## LXXXVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Aug. 3, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Entertaining some hope that Mr. Newton's next letter would furnish me with the means of satisfying



your inquiry on the subject of Dr. Johnson's opinion, I have till now delayed my answer to your last ; but the information is not yet come, Mr. Newton having intermitted a week more than usual since his last writing. When I receive it, favourable or not, it shall be communicated to you ; but I am not very sanguine in my expectations from that quarter. Very learned and very critical heads are hard to please. He may perhaps treat me with lenity for the sake of my subject and design, but the composition I think will hardly escape his censure. Though all doctors may not be of the same mind, there is one doctor at least, whom I have lately discovered, my professed admirer. He too, like Johnson, was with difficulty persuaded to read, having an aversion to all poetry, except the *Night Thoughts* ; which on a certain occasion, when being confined on board a ship he had no other employment, he got by heart. He was however prevailed upon, and read me several times over ; so that if my volume had sailed with him, instead of Dr. Young's, I might perhaps have occupied that shelf in his memory which he then allotted to the Doctor : his name is Renny, and he lives at Newport Pagnel.

It is a sort of paradox, but it is true : we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience.—Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking

with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first ; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper ! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the aforementioned hiss at the nose of a kitten almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few seconds missed him : he was gone, and I feared had escaped me. Still however the kitten sat watching immoveably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot ; with her claws however sheathed, and not in anger, but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed upon him an act of decapitation, which though not immediately mortal proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the out-houses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten ; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have

slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him. Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.

Our proposed removal to Mr. Small's was, as you suppose, a jest, or rather a joco-serious matter. We never looked upon it as entirely feasible, yet we saw in it something so like practicability, that we did not esteem it altogether unworthy of our attention. It was one of those projects which people of lively imaginations play with, and admire for a few days, and then break in pieces. Lady Austen returned on Thursday from London, where she spent the last fortnight, and whither she was called by an unexpected opportunity to dispose of the remainder of her lease. She has now therefore no longer any connexion with the great city, she has none on earth whom she calls friends but us, and no house but at Olney. Her abode is to be at the vicarage, where she has hired as much room as she wants, which she will embellish with her own furniture, and which she will occupy as soon as the minister's wife has produced another child, which is expected to make its entry in October.

Mr. Bull, a dissenting minister of Newport, a learned, ingenious, good-natured, pious friend of ours, who sometimes visits us, and whom we visited last week, has put into my hands three volumes of French poetry, composed by Madame Guyon;—a quietist say you, and a fanatic, I will have nothing to do with her.—It is very well, you are welcome to have

nothing to do with her, but in the mean time her verse is the only French verse I ever read that I found agreeable; there is a neatness in it equal to that which we applaud with so much reason in the compositions of Prior. I have translated several of them, and shall proceed in my translations, till I have filled a Lilliputian paper-book I happen to have by me, which when filled I shall present to Mr. Bull. He is her passionate admirer, rode twenty miles to see her picture in the house of a stranger, which stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it, and it now hangs over his parlour chimney. It is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and were it encompassed with a glory, instead of being dressed in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel.

Our meadows are covered with a winter-flood in August; the rushes with which our bottomless chairs were to have been bottomed, and much hay which was not carried, are gone down the river on a voyage to Ely, and it is even uncertain whether they will ever return. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* I am glad you have found a curate; may he answer! Am happy in Mrs. Bouverie's continued approbation; it is worth while to write for such a reader.—Yours,  
W. C.

## LXXXVIII

TO LADY AUSTEN.

To watch the storms, and hear the sky  
Give all our almanacks the lie ;  
To shake with cold, and see the plains  
In autumn drown'd with wintry rains ;  
'Tis thus I spend my moments here,  
And wish myself a Dutch Mynheer ;  
I then should have no need of wit,  
For lumpish Hollander unfit.  
Nor should I then repine at mud,  
Or meadows deluged with a flood ;  
But in a bog live well content,  
And find it just my element ;  
Should be a clod, and not a man,  
Nor wish in vain for Sister Ann,  
With charitable aid to drag  
My mind out of its proper quag ;  
Should have the genius of a boor,  
And no ambition to have more.

MY DEAR SISTER,

You see my beginning. I do not know but in time I may proceed even to the printing of halfpenny ballads—Excuse the coarseness of my paper ; I wasted such a quantity before I could accomplish any thing legible, that I could not afford finer. I intend to employ an ingenious mechanic of the town to make me a longer case ; for you may observe that my lines turn up their tails like Dutch mastiffs, so difficult do I find it to make the two halves exactly coincide with each other.

We wait with impatience for the departure of this



unseasonable flood. We think of you, and talk of you, but we can do no more, till the waters shall subside. I do not think our correspondence should drop because we are within a mile of each other. It is but an imaginary approximation, the flood having in reality as effectually parted us as if the British Channel rolled between us.—Yours, my dear sister, with Mrs. Unwin's best love.

W. C.

*Aug. 12, 1782.*

LXXXIX

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Nov. 11, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your shocking scrawl, as you term it, was, however, a very welcome one. The character, indeed, has not quite the neatness and beauty of an engraving; but, if it cost me some pains to decypher it, they were well rewarded by the minute information it conveyed. I am glad your health is such, that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the down-hill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally, to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement; the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping; and a happy emancipation from every thing that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for, and, the single circumstance of dependence excepted, (which, between our-

selves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition,) have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon.

You may not, perhaps, live to see your trees attain to the dignity of timber ;—I, nevertheless, approve of your planting, and the disinterested spirit that prompts you to it. Few people plant, when they are young ; a thousand other less profitable amusements divert their attention ; and most people, when the date of youth is once expired, think it too late to begin. I can tell you, however, for your comfort and encouragement, that when a grove, which Major Cowper had planted, was of eighteen years growth, it was no small ornament to his grounds, and afforded as complete a shade as could be desired. Were I as old as your mother, in whose longevity I rejoice, and the more, because I consider it as, in some sort, a pledge and assurance of yours, and should come to the possession of land worth planting, I would begin to-morrow, and even without previously insisting upon a bond from Providence that I should live five years longer.

I saw last week a gentleman who was lately at Hastings. I asked him where he lodged. He replied at P——'s. I next enquired after the poor man's wife, whether alive or dead. He answered, dead. So then, said I, she has scolded her last ; and a sensible old man will go down to his grave in peace. Mr. P——, to be sure, is of no great consequence, either to you, or to me ; but having so fair an opportunity to inform myself about him, I could not neglect it. It

gives me pleasure to learn somewhat of a man I knew a little of so many years since, and for that reason merely I mention the circumstance to you.

I find a single expression in your letter which needs correction. You say I carefully avoid paying you a visit at Wargrave. Not so;—but connected as I happily am, and rooted where I am, and not having travelled these twenty years,—being, besides, of an indolent temper, and having spirits that cannot bear a bustle—all these are so many insuperables in the way. They are not, however, in yours; and if you and Mrs. Hill will make the experiment, you shall find yourselves as welcome here, both to me and to Mrs. Unwin, as it is possible you can be any where.—  
Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

XC

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Nov. 18, 1782.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

On the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend Mr. Smith. I call him ours, because having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succour the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy; no creature shall

hear him mentioned, either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham ; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money ; but in this town, where the Gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all, and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing. Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always with them, and they are always, at least some of them, the better for your residence among them. Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the ragged

of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers. Accept therefore your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when he answers it, will remember his servant at Stock.

I little thought when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print—I intended to laugh, and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laughs, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have.—Well—they do not always laugh so innocently, or at so small an expense—for in a world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle*—a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend, nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity—a melancholy, that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written



in the saddest mood, and, but for that saddest mood, perhaps had never been written at all. To say truth, it would be but a shocking vagary, should the mariners on board a ship buffeted by a terrible storm, employ themselves in fiddling and dancing; yet sometimes much such a part act I.

I hear from Mrs. Newton, that some great persons have spoken with great approbation of a certain book.—Who they are, and what they have said, I am to be told in a future letter. The Monthly Reviewers in the mean time have satisfied me well enough.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

## XCI

*To Mrs. Newton.*

*Nov. 23, 1782.*

MY DEAR MADAM,

The soles with which you favoured us were remarkably fine. Accept our thanks for them; thanks likewise for the trouble you take in vending my poems, and still more for the interest you take in their success. My authorship is undoubtedly pleased when I hear that they are approved either by the great or the small; but to be approved by the great, as Horace observed many years ago, is fame indeed. Having met with encouragement, I consequently wish to write again; but wishes are a very small part of the qualifications necessary for such a purpose. Many a man who

has succeeded tolerably well in his first attempt, has spoiled all by the second. But it just occurs to me that I told you so once before, and if my memory had served me with the intelligence a minute sooner, I would not have repeated the observation now.

The winter sets in with great severity. The rigour of the season, and the advanced price of grain, are very threatening to the poor. It is well with those that can feed upon a promise, and wrap themselves up warm in the robe of salvation. A good fire-side and a well-spread table are but very indifferent substitutes for these better accommodations ; so very indifferent, that I would gladly exchange them both, for the rags and the unsatisfied hunger of the poorest creature that looks forward with hope to a better world, and weeps tears of joy in the midst of penury and distress. What a world is this ! How mysteriously governed, and, in appearance, left to itself. One man, having squandered thousands at a gaming-table, finds it convenient to travel ; gives his estate to somebody to manage for him ; amuses himself a few years in France and Italy ; returns, perhaps, wiser than he went, having acquired knowledge which, but for his follies, he would never have acquired ; again makes a splendid figure at home, shines in the senate, governs his country as its minister, is admired for his abilities, and, if successful, adored, at least by a party. When he dies he is praised as a demi-god, and his monument records every thing but his vices. The exact contrast of such a picture is to be found in many cottages at Olney. I have no need

to describe them ; you know the characters I mean. They love God, they trust him, they pray to him in secret, and though he means to reward them openly, the day of recompense is delayed. In the mean time they suffer every thing that infirmity and poverty can inflict upon them. Who would suspect, that has not a spiritual eye to discern it, that the fine gentleman was one whom his Maker had in abhorrence, and the wretch last-mentioned, dear to him as the apple of his eye ? It is no wonder that the world, who are not in the secret, find themselves obliged, some of them, to doubt a Providence, and others, absolutely to deny it, when almost all the real virtue there is in it, is to be found living and dying in a state of neglected obscurity, and all the vices of others cannot exclude them from the privilege of worship and honour ! But behind the curtain the matter is explained ; very little, however, to the satisfaction of the great.

If you ask me why I have written thus, and to you especially, to whom there was no need to write thus, I can only reply, that having a letter to write, and no news to communicate, I picked up the first subject I found, and pursued it as far as was convenient for my purpose.

Mr. Newton and I are of one mind on the subject of patriotism. Our dispute was no sooner begun than it ended. It would be well, perhaps, if, when two disputants begin to engage, their friends would hurry each into a separate chaise, and order them to opposite points of the compass. Let one travel twenty miles

east ; the other as many west ; then let them write their opinions by the post. Much altercation and chafing of the spirit would be prevented ; they would sooner come to a right understanding, and running away from each other, would carry on the combat more judiciously, in exact proportion to the distance.

My love to that gentleman, if you please ; and tell him, that, like him, though I love my country, I hate its follies and its sins, and had rather see it scourged in mercy, than judicially hardened by prosperity.

Mrs. Unwin is not very well, but better than she has been. She adds her love to both.—Yours, my dear Madam, as ever,

WM. COWPER.

## XCII

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Dec. 7, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream ; limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this

situation ; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine !—yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs ; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it ; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the mean time, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so ; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathise with our friends who can.

The papers tell me that peace is at hand, and that it is at a great distance ; that the siege of Gibraltar is abandoned, and that it is to be still continued. It is happy for me, that though I love my country, I have but little curiosity. There was a time when these contradictions would have distressed me, but I have



learnt by experience that it is best for little people like myself to be patient, and to wait till time affords the intelligence which no speculations of theirs can ever furnish.

I thank you for a fine cod with oysters, and hope that ere long, I shall have to thank you for procuring me Elliott's medicines. Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my *Æsculapius* being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever. Adieu. My respects to Mrs. Hill.—Yours faithfully,

WM. COWPER.

### XCIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Jan. 26, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber, the schoolmaster, and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place, that the belligerent powers are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door. I saw this morning, at nine o'clock, a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose, upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed, very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their

bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind ; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. The powers of Europe have clashed with each other to a fine purpose ; that the Americans, at length declared independent, may keep themselves so, if they can ; and that what the parties, who have thought proper to dispute upon that point, have wrested from each other in the course of the conflict, may be, in the issue of it, restored to the proper owner. Nations may be guilty of a conduct that would render an individual infamous for ever ; and yet carry their heads high, talk of their glory, and despise their neighbours. Your opinions and mine, I mean our political ones, are not exactly of a piece, yet I cannot think otherwise upon this subject than I have always done. England, more, perhaps, through the fault of her generals, than her councils, has in some instances acted with a spirit of cruel animosity she was never chargeable with till now. But this is the worst that can be said. On the other hand, the Americans, who, if they had contented themselves with a struggle for lawful liberty, would have deserved applause, seem to me to have incurred the guilt of parricide, by renouncing their parent, by making her ruin their

favourite object, and by associating themselves with her worst enemy, for the accomplishment of their purpose. France, and of course Spain, have acted a treacherous, a thievish part. They have stolen America from England, and whether they are able to possess themselves of that jewel or not hereafter, it was doubtless what they intended. Holland appears to me in a meaner light than any of them. They quarrelled with a friend for an enemy's sake. The French led them by the nose, and the English have thrashed them for suffering it. My views of the contest being, and having been always such, I have consequently brighter hopes for England than her situation some time since seemed to justify. She is the only injured party. America may, perhaps, call her the aggressor; but if she were so, America has not only repelled the injury, but done a greater. As to the rest, if perfidy, treachery, avarice, and ambition, can prove their cause to have been a rotten one, those proofs are found upon them. I think, therefore, that whatever scourge may be prepared for England, on some future day, her ruin is not yet to be expected.

Acknowledge, now, that I am worthy of a place under the shed I described, and that I should make no small figure among the *quidnuncs* of Olney.

I wish the society you have formed may prosper. Your subjects will be of greater importance, and discussed with more sufficiency. The earth is a grain of sand, but the spiritual interests of man are commensurate with the heavens.

Pray remind Mr. Bull, who has too much genius to have a good memory, that he has an account to settle for Mrs. Unwin with her grocer, and give our love to him. Accept for yourself and Mrs. Newton your just share of the same commodity, with our united thanks for a very fine barrel of oysters. This, indeed, is rather commending the barrel than its contents. I should say, therefore, for a barrel of very fine oysters.—Yours, my dear friend, as ever,

W. C.

#### XCIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*April 20, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

My device was intended to represent not my own heart, but the heart of a Christian, mourning and yet rejoicing, pierced with thorns, yet wreathed about with roses. I have the thorn without the rose. My brier is a wintry one, the flowers are withered, but the thorn remains. My days are spent in vanity, and it is impossible for me to spend them otherwise. No man upon earth is more sensible of the unprofitableness of a life like mine, than I am, or groans more heavily under the burthen; but this too is vanity, because it is in vain; my groans will not bring the remedy, because there is no remedy for me. The time when I seem to be most rationally employed, is when I am reading. My studies, however, are very

much confined, and of little use, because I have no books but what I borrow, and nobody will lend me a memory. My own is almost worn out. I read the *Biographia* and the *Review*. If all the readers of the former had memories like mine, the compilers of that work would in vain have laboured to rescue the great names of past ages from oblivion, for what I read to-day, I forget to-morrow. A by-stander might say, This is rather an advantage, the book is always new ; —but I beg the by-stander's pardon ; I can recollect though I cannot remember, and with the book in my hand I recognise those passages which, without the book, I should never have thought of more. The *Review* pleases me most, because, if the contents escape me, I regret them less, being a very supercilious reader of most modern writers. Either I dislike the subject, or the manner of treating it ; the style is affected, or the matter is disgusting. Your namesake the Bishop of Bristol furnishes the principal article of the two last numbers, but (though he was a learned man, and sometimes wrote like a wise one,) I see him labouring under invincible prejudices against the truth and its professors ; shrewd in his interpretations of prophecy, but heterodox in his opinions upon some religious subjects, and reasoning most weakly in support of them. How has he toiled to prove that the perdition of the wicked is not eternal, that there may be repentance in hell, and that the devils may be saved at last : thus establishing, as far as in him lies, the belief of a purgatory, and approaching nearer



to the church of Rome than ever any Methodist did, though papalizing is the crime with which he charges all of that denomination. When I think of the poor Bishop, I think too of some who shall say hereafter, "Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wondrous works? Then shall he say unto them, Depart from me, for I never knew you." But perhaps he might be enlightened in his last moments, and saved in the very article of dissolution. It is much to be wished, and indeed hoped, that he was. Such a man reprobated in the great day, would be the most melancholy spectacle of all that shall stand at the left hand hereafter. But I do not think that *many*, or indeed *any* will be found there, who in their lives were sober, virtuous, and sincere, truly pious in the use of their little light, and though ignorant of God, in comparison with some others, yet sufficiently informed to know that He is to be feared, loved, and trusted. An operation is often performed within the curtains of a dying bed, in behalf of such men, that the nurse and the doctor (I mean the doctor and the nurse) have no suspicion of. The soul makes but one step out of darkness into light, and makes that step without a witness. My brother's case has made me very charitable in my opinion about the future state of such men.

We wait with anxiety to be informed what news you receive from Scotland. Present our love, if you please, to Miss Cunningham. I saw in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for last month, an account of a

physician who has discovered a new method of treating consumptive cases, which has succeeded wonderfully in the trial. He finds the seat of the distemper in the stomach, and cures it principally by emetics. The old method of encountering the disorder has proved so unequal to the task, that I should be much inclined to any new practice that came well recommended. He is spoken of as a sensible and judicious man, but his name I have forgot.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

XCV

*To the Rev. William Bull.*

*June 3, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

My greenhouse, fronted with myrtles, and where I hear nothing but the pattering of a fine shower and the sound of distant thunder, wants only the fumes of your pipe to make it perfectly delightful. Tobacco was not known in the golden age. So much the worse for the golden age. This age of iron, or lead, would be insupportable without it; and therefore we may reasonably suppose that the happiness of those better days would have been much improved by the use of it. We hope that you and your son are perfectly recovered. The season has been most unfavourable to animal life; and I, who am merely animal, have suffered much by it.

Though I should be glad to write, I write little or nothing. The time for such fruit is not yet come ; but I expect it, and I wish for it. I want amusement ; and, deprived of that, have none to supply the place of it. I send you, however, according to my promise to send you every thing, two stanzas composed at the request of Lady Austen. She wanted words to a tune she much admired, and I gave her these on Peace.—

Yours,

W. C.

## XCVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*June 8, 1783.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Our severest winter, commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption ; my attention is called upon by those very myrtles, by a double row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom ; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all, and devote this hour entirely to you.

You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect,—

*Nihil est ab omni*

*Parte beatum.*

I find that your friend Mr. Fytche has lost his cause; and more mortifying still, has lost it by a single voice. Had I been a peer, he should have been secure of mine; for I am persuaded that if conditional presentations were in fashion, and if every minister held his benefice, as the judges their office, upon the

terms of *quamdiu bene se gesserit*, it would be better for the cause of religion, and more for the honour of the Establishment. There ought to be discipline somewhere; and if the Bishops will not exercise it, I do not see why lay patrons should have their hands tied. If I remember your state of the case, (and I never heard it stated but by you,) my reflections upon it are pertinent. It is however long since we talked about it, and I may possibly misconceive it at present: if so, they go for nothing. I understand that he presented upon condition, that if the parson proved immoral or negligent, he should have liberty to call upon him either for his resignation or the penalty. If I am wrong, correct me.

On the other side I send you a something, a song if you please, composed last Thursday—the incident happened the day before.<sup>1</sup>—Yours,

W. C.

## XCVII

*To the Rev. William Bull.*

*June 27, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A fine morning, though a shady one, has induced me to spend that time in walking which I had devoted to the quill; consequently I send you no letter for Mr. Newton, but am obliged to postpone my answer to his last till the usual opportunity shall arrive. I

<sup>1</sup> Here followed his song of the Rose.—R. SOUTHEY.



cannot resist fine weather ; and the omission is of no great consequence, both because I have nothing new to communicate, and because I have a frank which will convey that nothing to him gratis. I wish you and yours a pleasant excursion, as pleasant as the season and the scene to which you are going can possibly make it. I shall rejoice to hear from you, and am sufficiently flattered by the recollection, that just after hearing you protest against all letter-writing, I heard you almost promise to write a letter to me. The journeys of a man like you must all be sentimental journeys, and better worth the recital than Sterne's would have been, had he travelled to this moment. Adieu, my friend !—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin's love. Send the *Review*.

### XCVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

June 29, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The translation of your letters into *Dutch* was news that pleased me *much*. I intended plain prose, but a rhyme obtruded itself, and I became poetical when I least expected it. The Bœotian atmosphere I have breathed these six days past, makes such a sally of genius the more surprising,—so long, in a country not subject to fogs, we have been covered with one of

the thickest I remember. We never see the sun but shorn of his beams. The trees are scarce discernible at a mile's distance. He sets with the face of a red-hot salamander, and rises, (as I learn from report,) with the same complexion. Such a phenomenon at the end of June has occasioned much speculation among the *connoscenti* at this place. Some fear to go to bed, expecting an earthquake; some declare that he neither rises nor sets where he did, and assert with great confidence that the day of Judgement is at hand. This is probable, and I believe it myself, but for other reasons. In the meantime I cannot discover in them, however alarmed, the symptoms even of a temporary reformation. This very Sunday morning the pitchers of all have been carried into Silver End as usual, the inhabitants perhaps judging that they have more than ordinary need of that cordial at such a juncture. It is however, seriously, a remarkable appearance, and the only one of the kind that at this season of the year has fallen under my notice. Signs in the heavens are predicted characters of the last times; and in the course of the last fifteen years I have been a witness of many. The present obfuscation, (if I may call it so,) of all nature may be ranked perhaps among the most remarkable; but possibly it may not be universal; in London at least, where a dingy atmosphere is frequent, it may be less observable.

Pardon a digression which I slipped into at un-awares, a transition from Holland to a fog was not unnatural. When you wrote those letters you did

not dream that you were designed for an apostle to the Dutch. Yet so it proves, and such among many others are the advantages we derive from the art of printing : an art in which indisputably man was instructed by the same great teacher who taught him to embroider for the service of the sanctuary, and to beat out the cummin,—and which amounts almost to as great a blessing as the gift of tongues, diffusing an author's sentiments upon the noblest subjects through a people.

Mrs. Unwin desires me to send her love, and to thank Mrs. Newton for all she has done for her. Every thing has arrived safe, and been managed exactly to her mind. In the course of next month she hopes to treat you with a cupple of dux.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## XCIX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*July 27, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You cannot have more pleasure in receiving a letter from me, than I should find in writing it, were it not almost impossible in such a place to find a subject.

I live in a world abounding with incidents, upon which many grave, and perhaps some profitable observations might be made ; but those incidents never reaching my unfortunate ears, both the entertaining narrative and the reflection it might suggest are to

me annihilated and lost. I look back to the past week, and say, what did it produce? I ask the same question of the week preceding, and duly receive the same answer from both,—nothing!—A situation like this, in which I am as unknown to the world, as I am ignorant of all that passes in it, in which I have nothing to do but to think, would exactly suit me, were my subjects of meditation as agreeable as my leisure is uninterrupted. My passion for retirement is not at all abated, after so many years spent in the most sequestered state, but rather increased;—a circumstance I should esteem wonderful to a degree not to be accounted for, considering the condition of my mind, did I not know, that we think as we are made to think, and of course approve and prefer, as Providence, who appoints the bounds of our habitation, chooses for us. Thus am I both free and a prisoner at the same time. The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates, of which I have not the key;—but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same

cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent ; some of them perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is, and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.—

*Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes  
Angulus ridet.*

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself and with the least disturbance to others.

You wonder, and (I dare say) unfeignedly, because you do not think yourself entitled to such praise, that I prefer your style, as an historian, to that of the two most renowned writers of history the present day has seen. That you may not suspect me of having said more than my real opinion will warrant, I will tell you why. In your style I see no affectation. In every line of theirs I see nothing else. They disgust me always, Robertson with his pomp and his strut, and Gibbon with his finical and French manners. You



are as correct as they. You express yourself with us much precision. Your words are ranged with us much propriety, but you do not set your periods to a tune. They discover a perpetual desire to exhibit themselves to advantage, whereas your subject engrosses you. They sing, and you say ; which, as history is a thing to be said, and not sung, is, in my judgement, very much to your advantage. A writer that despises their tricks, and is yet neither inelegant nor inharmonious, proves himself, by that single circumstance, a man of superior judgement and ability to them both. You have my reasons. I honour a manly character, in which good sense, and a desire of doing good, are the predominant features ;—but affectation is an emetic.

W. C.

C

*To the Rev. William Bull.*

*Aug. 3, 1783.*

MY DEAR BULL,

I began to despair of you as a correspondent, yet not to blame you for being silent. I am acquainted with Rottingdean and all its charms, the downs, the cliff, and the agreeable opportunities of sauntering that the seaside affords. I knew, besides, that your preachings would be frequent, and allowed an especial force above all to the consideration of your natural indolence ; for though diligent and active in your business, you know in your heart that you love your ease, as all parsons do : these weighty causes all concurring to

justify your silence, I should have been very unreasonable had I condemned it.

I laughed, as you did, at the alarm taken by your reverend brother of the Establishment, and at his choice of a text by way of antidote to the noxious tendency of your discourses. The text, with a little transposition and variation of the words, would perhaps have come nearer to the truth, and have suited the occasion better.

Instead of exhorting his hearers to hold fast the form of sound words, he should have said the sound of a form, which I take to be a just description of the sermons he makes himself, that have nothing but a sound and a form to recommend them. I rejoice that the bathing has been of use to you; the more you wash the filthier may you be, that your days may be prolonged, and your health more established. Scratching is good exercise, promotes the circulation, elicits the humours, and if you will take a certain monarch's word, of itching memory, is too great a pleasure for a subject.

I was always an admirer of thunder-storms, even before I knew whose voice I heard in them; but especially an admirer of thunder rolling over the great waters. There is something singularly majestic in the sound of it at sea, where the eye and the ear have uninterrupted opportunity of observation, and the concavity above being made spacious reflects it with more advantage. I have consequently envied you your situation, and the enjoyment of those refreshing breezes

that belong to it. We have indeed been regaled with some of these bursts of ethereal music.—The peals have been as loud, by the report of a gentleman who lived many years in the West Indies, as were ever heard in those islands, and the flashes as splendid. But when the thunder preaches, an horizon bounded by the ocean is the only sounding-board.

I have but little leisure, strange as it may seem : that little I devoted for a month after your departure to the translation of Madame Guyon. I have made fair copies of all the pieces I have produced upon this last occasion, and will put them into your hands when we meet. They are yours, to serve you as you please ; you may take and leave as you like, for my purpose is already served. They have amused me, and I have no further demands upon them. The lines upon Friendship however, which were not sufficiently of a piece with the others, will not now be wanted. I have some other little things which I will communicate when time shall serve, but I cannot now transcribe them.

Mrs. Unwin is well, and begs to be affectionately remembered to you and yours. I wish you many smugglers to shine in your crown of rejoicing on a certain day that approaches, and would take the trade myself if I could suppose it might be the means of introducing me to a place amongst them ; but I must neither wear a crown, nor help to adorn one.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

## CI

*To the Rev. William Bull.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I received your letter on the first. I answer on the third. You leave Lymington on the sixth, and will consequently be at home when you receive my answer. I shall not therefore be very prolix, writing as I do, under the expectation and hope that we shall see you soon.

We are both indebted and obliged to you for your journal of occurrences, and are glad that there is not one amongst them for which *you* have reason to be sorry. Your seaside situation, your beautiful prospects, your fine rides, and the sight of the palaces which you have seen, we have not envied you ; but are glad that you have enjoyed them. Why should we envy any man ? Is not our greenhouse a cabinet of perfumes ? It is at this moment fronted with carnations and balsalms, with mignonette and roses, with jessamine and woodbine, and wants nothing but your pipe to make it truly Arabian ;—a wilderness of sweets ! The *Sofa* is ended, but not finished ; a paradox, which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it ; on the contrary I find it severe exercise, to mould and fashion it to my mind !

Let us see you as soon as possible ; present our

affectionate respects to your family, and tell the Welshman and his chum that if they do not behave themselves well, I will lash them soundly; they will not be the first academics to whom I have shown no mercy.—Yours, with Mrs. Unwin's love,

WM. COWPER.

## CII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*August 4, 1783.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnson aside to make the enquiry you purpose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and so long as I have the opinion of a few capable judges in my favour, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing on scriptural subjects, were an unreasonable ambition, even for a poet to entertain, in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question therefore boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head, and drop his



chin ; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet.

I am glad you were pleased with my Latin ode, and indeed with my English dirge, as much as I was myself. The tune laid me under a disadvantage, obliging me to write in Alexandrines ; which I suppose would suit no ear but a French one ; neither did I intend any thing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music. The ballad is a species of poetry, I believe, peculiar to this country, equally adapted to the drollest and the most tragical subjects. Simplicity and ease are its proper characteristics. Our forefathers excelled in it ; but we moderns have lost the art. It is observed, that we have few good English odes. But to make amends, we have many excellent ballads, not inferior perhaps in true poetical merit to some of the very best odes that the Greek or Latin languages have to boast of. It is a sort of composition I was ever fond of, and if graver matters had not called me another way, should have addicted myself to it more than to any other. I inherit a taste for it from my father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that way were produced. What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's, and Gay's, in the *What do ye call it*—" 'Twas when the seas were roaring " ? I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association

of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song. The success however answered to their wishes, and our puny days will never produce such another. The ballads that Bourne has translated, beautiful in themselves, are still more beautiful in his version of them, infinitely surpassing, in my judgement, all that Ovid or Tibullus have left behind them. They are quite as elegant, and far more touching and pathetic than the tenderest strokes of either.

So much for ballads, and ballad writers. "A worthy subject," you will say, "for a man whose head might be filled with better things;"—and *it is* filled with better things, but to so ill a purpose, that I thrust into it all manner of topics that may prove more amusing; as for instance, I have two goldfinches, which in the summer occupy the greenhouse. A few days since, being employed in cleaning out their cages, I placed that which I had in hand upon the table, while the other hung against the wall: the windows and the doors stood wide open. I went to fill the fountain at the pump, and on my return was not a little surprised to find a goldfinch sitting on the top of the cage I had been cleaning, and singing to and kissing the goldfinch within. I approached him, and he discovered no fear; still nearer, and he discovered none. I advanced my hand towards him, and he took no notice of it. I seized him, and supposed I had caught a new bird, but casting my

eye upon the other cage perceived my mistake. Its inhabitant, during my absence, had contrived to find an opening, where the wire had been a little bent, and made no other use of the escape it afforded him, than to salute his friend, and to converse with him more intimately than he had done before. I returned him to his proper mansion, but in vain. In less than a minute he had thrust his little person through the aperture again, and again perched upon his neighbour's cage, kissing him, as at the first, and singing, as if transported with the fortunate adventure. I could not but respect such friendship, as for the sake of its gratification had twice declined an opportunity to be free, and, consenting to their union, resolved that for the future one cage should hold them both. I am glad of such incidents ; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification of them serves to divert me.

I hope you will receive a very fine melon, which we send according to your last direction : it will leave this place on Wednesday.

I transcribe for you a piece of Madame Guyon, not as the best, but as being shorter than many, and as good as most of them.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## CIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Sept. 29, 1783.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

We are sorry that you and your household partake so largely of the ill effects of this unhealthy season. You are happy however in having hitherto escaped the epidemic fever, which has prevailed much in this part of the kingdom, and carried many off. Your mother and I are well. After more than a fortnight's indisposition, which slight appellation is quite adequate to the description of all I suffered, I am at length restored by a grain or two of emetic tartar. It is a tax I generally pay in autumn. By this time, I hope, a purer ether than we have seen for months, and these brighter suns than the summer had to boast, have cheered your spirits, and made your existence more comfortable. We are rational; but we are animal too, and therefore subject to the influences of the weather. The cattle in the fields show evident symptoms of lassitude and disgust in an unpleasant season; and we, their lords and masters, are constrained to sympathize with them: the only difference between us is, that they know not the cause of their dejection, and we do,—but, for our humiliation, are equally at a loss to cure it. Upon this account I have sometimes wished myself a philosopher. How happy, in comparison with myself, does the sagacious investigator

of nature seem, whose fancy is ever employed in the invention of *hypotheses*, and his reason in the support of them! While he is accounting for the origin of the winds, he has no leisure to attend to their influence upon himself; and while he considers what the sun is made of, forgets that he has not shone for a month. One project indeed supplants another. The *vortices* of Descartes gave way to the gravitation of Newton, and this again is threatened by the electrical fluid of a modern. One generation blows bubbles, and the next breaks them. But in the mean time your philosopher is a happy man. He escapes a thousand inquietudes to which the indolent are subject, and finds his occupation, whether it be the pursuit of a butterfly, or a demonstration, the wholesomest exercise in the world. As he proceeds, he applauds himself. His discoveries, though eventually perhaps they prove but dreams, are to him realities. The world gaze at him, as he does at new phenomena in the heavens, and perhaps understand him as little. But this does not prevent their praises, nor at all disturb him in the enjoyment of that self-complacence, to which his imaginary success entitles him. He wears his honours while he lives, and if another strips them off when he has been dead a century, it is no great matter; he can then make shift without them.

I have said a great deal upon this subject, and know not what it all amounts to. I did not intend a syllable of it when I began. But *currente calamo*, I stumbled upon it. My end is to amuse myself and



you. The former of these two points is secured. I shall be happy if I do not miss the latter.

By the way, what is your opinion of these air-balloons? I am quite charmed with the discovery. Is it not possible (do you suppose) to convey such a quantity of inflammable air into the stomach and abdomen, that the philosopher, no longer gravitating to a centre, shall ascend by his own comparative levity, and never stop till he has reached the medium exactly *in equilibrio* with himself? May he not by the help of a pasteboard rudder, attached to his posteriors, steer himself in that purer element with ease; and again by a slow and gradual discharge of his aerial contents, recover his former tendency to the earth, and descend without the smallest danger or inconvenience? These things are worth inquiry; and (I dare say) they will be inquired after as they deserve. The *pennæ non homini datæ* are likely to be less regretted than they were; and perhaps a flight of academicians and a covey of fine ladies may be no uncommon spectacle in the next generation. A letter which appeared in the public prints last week convinces me, that the learned are not without hopes of some such improvement upon this discovery. The author is a sensible and ingenious man, and under a reasonable apprehension that the ignorant may feel themselves inclined to laugh upon a subject that affects himself with the utmost seriousness, with much good manners and management bespeaks their patience, suggesting many good

consequences that may result from a course of experiments upon this machine, and amongst others, that it may be of use in ascertaining the shape of continents and islands, and the face of wide-extended and far distant countries ; an end not to be hoped for, unless by these means of extraordinary elevation the human prospect may be immensely enlarged, and the philosopher, exalted to the skies, attain a view of the whole hemisphere at once. But whether he is to ascend by the mere inflation of his person, as hinted above, or whether in a sort of bandbox, supported upon balloons, is not yet apparent, nor (I suppose) even in his own idea perfectly decided.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

CIV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Oct. 20, 1783.*

I should not have been thus long silent, had I known with certainty where a letter of mine might find you. Your summer excursions however are now at an end, and addressing a line to you in the centre of the busy scene in which you spend your winter, I am pretty sure of my mark.

I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather and the pleasant scenes of summer ; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature

as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter. I mean however an Englishman that lives in the country, for in London it is not very easy to avoid intrusion. I have two ladies to read to, sometimes more, but never less. At present we are circumnavigating the globe, and I find the old story with which I amused myself some years since, through the great felicity of a memory not very retentive, almost new. I am however sadly at a loss for Cook's voyage, can you send it? I shall be glad of Foster's too. These together will make the winter pass merrily, and you will much oblige me.

W. C.

CV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Oct. 20, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have nothing to say on political subjects, for two reasons; first, because I know none that at present would prove very amusing, especially to you who love your country; and secondly, because there are none that I have the vanity to think myself qualified to discuss. I must beg leave, however, to rejoice a little at the failure of the Caisse d'Escomptes, because I think the French have well deserved it; and to mourn equally that the Royal George cannot be weighed: the rather, because I wrote two poems, one Latin and one English, to encourage the attempt.

The former of these only having been published, which the sailors would understand but little of, may be the reason, perhaps, why they have not succeeded. —Believe me, my friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

CVI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

Oct. 22, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have made a point of saying no fine things to Mr. Bacon, upon an occasion that would well have justified them; deterred by a *Caveat* he entered in his letter. Nothing can be more handsome than the present, nor more obliging than the manner in which he has made it. I take it for granted that the plate is, line for line, and stroke for stroke, an exact representation of his performance, as nearly at least, as light and shade can exhibit, upon a flat surface, the effect of a piece of statuary. I may be allowed therefore to say that I admire it. My situation affords me no opportunity to cultivate the science of connoisseurship; neither would there be much propriety in my speaking the language of one to you, who disclaim the character. But we both know when we are pleased. It occurs to me, however, that I ought to say what it is that pleases me, for a general commendation, where there are so many particular beauties, would be insipid and unjust.

I think the figure of Lord Chatham singularly graceful, and his countenance full of the character that belongs to him. It speaks not only great ability and consummate skill, but a tender and heartfelt interest in the welfare of the charge committed to him. In the figure of the City, there is all that *empressement* (pardon a French term, it expresses my idea better than any English one that occurs,) that the importance of her errand calls for; and it is noble in its air, though in a posture of supplication. But the figure of Commerce is indeed a perfect beauty. It is a literal truth, that I felt the tears flush into my eyes while I looked at her. The idea of so much elegance and grace having found so powerful a protection, was irresistible. There is a complacency and serenity in the air and countenance of Britannia, more suited to her dignity than that exultation and triumph which a less judicious hand might have dressed her in. She seems happy to sit at the feet of her deliverer.—I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart, but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure. The faces are all expressive, and the figures are all graceful.—If you think the opinion of so unlearned a spectator worth communicating, and that I have not said more than Mr. Bacon's modesty can bear without offence, you are welcome to make him privy to my sentiments. I know not why he should be hurt by just praise; his fine talent is a gift, and all the merit of it is His property who gave it.

We are sorry to be told by Mr. Jones that you



are neither of you well, and heartily wish you may be able to tell us in your next that you are better. Our love to Mrs. Newton.—Believe me, my dear friend, sincerely and affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

I am out of your debt.

## CVII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Nov. 10, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I have lost and wasted almost all my writing time, in making an alteration in the verses I either enclose or subjoin, for I know not which will be the case at present.<sup>1</sup> If prose comes readily, I shall transcribe them on another sheet, otherwise, on this. You will understand, before you have read many of them, that they are not for the press. I lay you under no other injunctions. The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance, though it is possible that in some instances it

<sup>1</sup> The verses referred to are *The Valediction*. The two unkind friends to whom Cowper bade farewell in that poem were the Lord Chancellor Thurlow and George Colman, manager of the Haymarket theatre, the latter of whom had been a schoolfellow of Cowper at Westminster. To both of them the poet sent a copy of his first volume. Neither of them acknowledged the receipt of the present. Afterwards when he was famous, the two deigned to notice their old friend, and the gentle Cowper forgave and corresponded with them both. Thurlow's letters to Cowper on his translation of Homer are printed in the poet's correspondence. They do as little credit to the writer's head as his conduct to Cowper did to his heart.

may not much affect our happiness, nor engage many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted ; and then perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment, which perhaps I ought not to have indulged, but which in a cooler hour I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion. So much by way of preface.

You ought not to have supposed that if you had visited us last summer, the pleasure of the interview would have been all your own. By such an imagination you wrong both yourself and us. Do you suppose we do not love you ? You cannot suspect your mother of coldness ; and as to me, assure yourself I have no friend in the world with whom I communicate without the least reserve, yourself excepted. Take heart then, and when you find a favourable opportunity to come, assure yourself of such a welcome from us both as you have a right to look for. But I have observed in your two last letters somewhat of a dejection and melancholy, that I am afraid you do not sufficiently strive against. I suspect you of being too sedentary. "You cannot walk." Why you cannot is best known to yourself. I am sure your legs are long enough, and your person does not overload them.

But I beseech you ride, and ride often. I think I have heard you say, you cannot even do that without an object. Is not health an object? Is not a new prospect, which in most countries is gained at the end of every mile, an object? Assure yourself that easy chairs are no friends to cheerfulness, and that a long winter spent by the fireside is a prelude to an unhealthy spring. Every thing I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This indeed is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with nature, when I could fairly catch it. I earnestly recommend a cultivation of the same taste to you, suspecting that you have neglected it, and suffer for doing so.

Last Saturday se'nnight, the moment I had composed myself in my bed, your mother too having just got into hers, we were alarmed by a cry of fire on the staircase. I immediately rose, and saw sheets of flame above the roof of Mr. Palmer's house, our opposite neighbour. The mischief however was not so near to him as it seemed to be, having begun in a butcher's yard, at a little distance. We made all haste down stairs, and soon threw open the street door, for the reception of as much lumber, of all sorts, as our house would hold, brought into it by several who thought it necessary to move their furniture. In two hours time we had so much that we could hold

no more, even the uninhabited part of our building being filled. Not that we ourselves were entirely secure—an adjoining thatch, on which fell showers of sparks, being rather a dangerous neighbour. Providentially, however, the night was perfectly calm, and we escaped. By four in the morning it was extinguished, having consumed many out-buildings, but no dwelling-house. Your mother suffered a little in her health, from the fatigue and bustle of the night, but soon recovered. As for me, it hurt me not. The slightest wind would have carried the fire to the very extremity of the town, there being multitudes of thatched buildings and faggot-piles so near to each other, that they must have proved infallible conductors.

The balloons prosper ; and I congratulate you upon it. Thanks to Montgolfier,<sup>1</sup> we shall fly at last.—Yours,  
my dear friend,

W. C.

## CVIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Nov. 17, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A parcel arrived last night, the contents of which shall be disposed of according to order. We thank

<sup>1</sup> The balloon was invented by two Frenchmen, the brothers Stephen and Joseph Montgolfier of Annonay, near Lyons, where the first ascent of a balloon took place, June 5, 1783.

Mrs. Newton (not from the teeth outwards) for the tooth-brushes.

The country around us is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds, and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Some madman or some devil has broke loose, who it is to be hoped will pay dear for these effusions of his malignity. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; Sue Riviss, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had Billy Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is



the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron-work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipt, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Hinschcomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapt his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has

been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for an old pair of breeches. In answer to our enquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much ; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough over-head. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be over-head, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt, a night or two since, that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and, with one flourish of my whip, descended ; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and

seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations ; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it.

I beg you will accept for yourself and yours our unfeigned love, and remember me affectionately to Mr. Bacon, when you see him.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CIX

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Nov. 23, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Your opinion of voyages and travels would spoil an appetite less keen than mine ; but being pretty much, perhaps more than any man who can be said to enjoy his liberty, confined to a spot, and being very desirous of knowing all that can be known of this same planet of ours, while I have the honour to belong to it,—and having, besides, no other means of information at my command, I am constrained to be satisfied with narratives, not always, indeed, to be implicitly depended upon, but which, being subjected to the exercise of a little consideration, cannot materially deceive us. Swinburn's is a book I had fixed upon, and deter-

mined, if possible, to procure, being pleased with some extracts from it, which I found in the *Review*. I need hardly add that I shall be much obliged to Mrs. Hill for a sight of it. I account myself truly and much indebted to that lady for the trouble she is so kind as to take upon my account, and shall esteem myself her debtor for all the amusement I meet with, in the southern hemisphere, should I be so fortunate as to get there. My reading is pretty much circumscribed, both by want of books and the influence of particular reasons. Politics are my abhorrence, being almost always hypothetical, fluctuating, and impracticable. Philosophy—I should have said natural philosophy, mathematically studied, does not suit me; and such exhibitions of that subject, as are calculated for less learned readers, I have read in former days, and remember in the present. Poetry, English poetry, I never touch, being pretty much addicted to the writing of it, and knowing that much intercourse with those gentlemen betrays us unavoidably into a habit of imitation, which I hate and despise most cordially.

I am glad my uncle is so well, and that he found new beauties in so old an acquaintance as the scene at Hastings. My most affectionate respects to him, if you please, when you see him next.—If *he* be the happiest man, who has least money in the funds, there are few upon earth whom I have any occasion to envy. I would consent, however, to have my pounds multiplied into thousands, even at the hazard of all I might feel from that tormenting passion. I send nothing to

the papers myself, but Unwin sometimes sends for me. His receptacle of my squibs is the *Public Advertiser*; but they are very few, and my present occupations are of a kind that will still have a tendency to make them fewer.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Nov. 24, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

An evening unexpectedly retired, and which your mother and I spend without company (an occurrence far from frequent), affords me a favourable opportunity to write by to-morrow's post, which else I could not have found. You are very good to consider my literary necessities with so much attention, and I feel proportionably grateful. Blair's *Lectures* (though I suppose they must make a part of my private studies, not being *ad captum fœminarum*) will be perfectly welcome.

You say you felt my verses; I assure you that in this you followed my example, for I felt them first. A man's lordship is nothing to me, any further than in connexion with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privileged by it to treat me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I am however most angry with the manager. He has



published a book since he received mine, and has not vouchsafed to send it me; a requital which good manners, not to say the remembrance of former friendship, ought to have suggested. I will not, however, belie my knowledge of mankind so much, as to seem surprised at treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men, with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon, and whether I have a lantern, a dog and a faggot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference: upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual, and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it.

L'Estrange's Josephus has lately furnished us with evening lectures. But the historian is so tediously circumstantial, and the translator so insupportably coarse and vulgar, that we are all three weary of him. How would Tacitus have shone upon such a subject, great master as he was of the art of description, concise without obscurity, and affecting without being poetical. But so it was ordered, and for wise reasons no doubt, that the greatest calamities any people ever suffered, and an accomplishment of one of the most signal prophecies in the Scripture, should be recorded by one of the worst writers. The man was a temporizer too, and courted the favour of his Roman masters

at the expense of his own creed ; or else an infidel, and absolutely disbelieved it. You will think me very difficult to please ; I quarrel with Josephus for the want of elegance, and with some of our modern historians for having too much. With him, for running right forward like a gazette, without stopping to make a single observation by the way ; and with them, for pretending to delineate characters that existed two thousand years ago, and to discover the motives by which they were influenced, with the same precision as if they had been their contemporaries. Simplicity is become a very rare quality in a writer. In the decline of great kingdoms, and where refinement in all the arts is carried to an excess, I suppose it is always rare. The latter Roman writers are remarkable for false ornament, they were yet no doubt admired by the readers of their own day ; and with respect to authors of the present era, the most popular among them appear to me equally censurable on the same account. Swift and Addison were simple ; Pope knew how to be so, but was frequently tinged with affectation ; since their day I hardly know a celebrated writer who deserves the character. But your mother wants room for a postscript, so my lecture must conclude abruptly.—Yours,

W. C.

## CXI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Nov. 30, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have neither long visits to pay nor to receive, nor ladies to spend hours in telling me that which might be told in five minutes, yet often find myself obliged to be an economist of time, and to make the most of a short opportunity. Let our station be as retired as it may, there is no want of playthings and avocations, nor much need to seek them, in this world of ours. Business, or what presents itself to us under that imposing character, will find us out, even in the stillest retreat, and plead its importance, however trivial in reality, as a just demand upon our attention. It is wonderful how by means of such real or seeming necessities, my time is stolen away. I have just time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone. I have wondered in former days at the patience of the Antediluvian world; that they could endure a life almost millenary, with so little variety as seems to have fallen to their share. It is probable that they had much fewer employments than we. Their affairs lay in a narrower compass; their libraries were indifferently furnished; philosophical researches were carried on with much less industry and acuteness of penetration, and fiddles, perhaps, were not even invented. How then could

seven or eight hundred years of life be supportable? I have asked this question formerly, and been at a loss to resolve it; but I think I can answer it now. I will suppose myself born a thousand years before Noah was born or thought of. I rise with the sun; I worship; I prepare my breakfast; I swallow a bucket of goats' milk, and a dozen good sizeable cakes. I fasten a new string to my bow, and my youngest boy, a lad of about thirty years of age, having played with my arrows till he has stript off all the feathers, I find myself obliged to repair them. The morning is thus spent in preparing for the chace, and it is become necessary that I should dine. I dig up my roots; I wash them; I boil them; I find them not done enough, I boil them again; my wife is angry; we dispute; we settle the point; but in the mean time the fire goes out, and must be kindled again. All this is very amusing. I hunt; I bring home the prey; with the skin of it I mend an old coat, or I make a new one. By this time the day is far spent; I feel myself fatigued, and retire to rest. Thus what with tilling the ground and eating the fruit of it, hunting and walking, and running, and mending old clothes, and sleeping and rising again, I can suppose an inhabitant of the primæval world so much occupied, as to sigh over the shortness of life, and to find at the end of many centuries, that they had all slipt through his fingers, and were passed away like a shadow. What wonder then that I, who live in a day of so much greater refinement, when there is so much more to be

wanted, and wished, and to be enjoyed, should feel myself now and then pinched in point of opportunity, and at some loss for leisure to fill four sides of a sheet like this? Thus, however, it is, and if the ancient gentlemen to whom I have referred, and their complaints of the disproportion of time to the occasions they had for it, will not serve me as an excuse, I must even plead guilty, and confess that I am often in haste, when I have no good reason for being so.

This by way of introduction ; now for my letter. Mr. Scott is desired by Mr. De Coetlegon to contribute to the *Theological Review*, of which, I suppose, that gentleman is a manager. He says he has insured your assistance, and at the same time desires mine, either in prose or verse. He did well to apply to you, because you can afford him substantial help ; but as for me, had he known me better, he would never have suspected me for a theologian, either in rhyme or otherwise.

Lord Dartmouth's Mr. Wright spent near two hours with me this morning ; a respectable old man, whom I always see with pleasure, both for his master's sake and for his own. I was glad to learn from him that his lordship has better health than he has enjoyed for some years.—Believe me, my dear friend, your affectionate

WM. COWPER.



## CXII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Dec. 15, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I know not how it fares with you, at a time when philosophy has just brought forth her most extraordinary production, not excepting, perhaps, that prodigy, a ship, in all respects complete, and equal to the task of circumnavigating the globe. My mind, however, is frequently getting into these balloons, and is busy in multiplying speculations as airy as the regions through which they pass. The last account from France, which seems so well authenticated, has changed my jocularly upon this occasion into serious expectation. The invention of these new vehicles is yet in its infancy, yet already they seem to have attained a degree of perfection which navigation did not reach, till ages of experience had matured it, and science had exhausted both her industry and her skill, in its improvement. I am aware, indeed, that the first boat or canoe that was ever formed, though rude in its construction—perhaps not constructed at all, being only a hollow tree that had fallen casually in the water, and which, though furnished with neither sails nor oars, might yet be guided by a pole—was a more perfect creature in its kind than a balloon at present; the single circumstance of its manageable nature giving it a clear superiority both in respect of safety and convenience. But the

atmosphere, though a much thinner medium, we well know, resists the impression made upon it by the tail of a bird, as effectually as the water that of a ship's rudder. Pope, when inculcating one of his few useful lessons, and directing mankind to the providence of God as the true source of all their wisdom, says beautifully—

Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.

It is easy to parody these lines, so as to give them an accommodation and suitableness to the present purpose.

Learn of the circle-making kite to fly.  
Spread the fan-tail, and wheel about the sky.

It is certain, at least, that nothing within the reach of human ingenuity will be left unattempted to accomplish, and add all that is wanting to this last effort of philosophical contrivance. The approximating powers of the telescope, and the powers by which the thunder-storm is delivered of its contents peaceably and without mischief, were once, perhaps, in appearance more remote from discovery, and seemed less practicable, than we may now suppose it, to give direction to that which is already buoyant; especially possessed as we are of such consummate mechanical skill, already masters of principles which we have nothing to do but to apply, of which we have already availed ourselves in the similar case of navigation, and having in every fowl of the air a pattern, which now at length it may be sufficient to imitate. Wings and a tail, indeed,

were of little use, while the body, so much heavier than the space of air it occupied, was sure to sink by its own weight, and could never be held in equipoise by any implements of the kind which human strength could manage. But now we float ; at random, indeed, pretty much, and as the wind drives us ; for want of nothing, however, but that steerage which invention, the conqueror of many equal, if not superior difficulties, may be expected to supply.—Should the point be carried, and man at last become as familiar with the air as he has long been with the ocean, will it in its consequences prove a mercy, or a judgement ? I think, a judgement. First, because if a power to convey himself from place to place, like a bird, would have been good for him, his Maker would have formed him with such a capacity. But he has been a groveller upon the earth for six thousand years, and now at last, when the close of this present state of things approaches, begins to exalt himself above it. So much the worse for *him*. Like a truant school-boy, he breaks his bounds, and will have reason to repent of his presumption.—Secondly, I think it will prove a judgement, because, with the exercise of very little foresight, it is easy to prognosticate a thousand evils which the project must necessarily bring after it ; amounting at last to the confusion of all order, the annihilation of all authority, with dangers both to property and person, and impunity to the offenders. Were I an absolute legislator, I would therefore make it death for a man to be convicted of flying, the

moment he could be caught ; and to bring him down from his altitudes by a bullet sent through his head or his carriage, should be no murder. Philosophers would call me a Vandal ; the scholar would say that, had it not been for me, the fable of Dædalus would have been realized ; and historians would load my memory with reproaches of phlegm, and stupidity, and oppression ; but in the mean time the world would go on quietly, and if it enjoyed less liberty, would at least be more secure.

I know not what are your sentiments upon the subject of the East India Bill.<sup>1</sup> This, too, has frequently afforded me matter of speculation. I can easily see that it is not without its blemishes ; but its beauties, in my eye, are much predominant. Whatever may be its author's views, if he delivers so large a portion of mankind from such horrible tyranny as the East has so long suffered, he deserves a statue much more than Montgolfier, who, it seems, is to receive that honour. Perhaps he may bring our own freedom into jeopardy ; but to do this for the sake of emancipating nations so much more numerous than ourselves, is at least generous, and a design that should have my encouragement, if I had any encouragement to afford it.

We are well, and love you. Remember us, as I doubt not you do, with the same affection, and be content with my sentiments upon subjects such as

<sup>1</sup> Fox's bill for the better government of British India. Burke spoke in favour of it, December 1, 1783. It was thrown out through the influence of George III.

these, till I can send you, if that day should ever come, a letter more worthy of your reception.—Nous sommes les vôtres, GUILLAUME ET MARIE.

## CXIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Jan. 3, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Your silence began to be distressing both to your mother and me, and had I not received a letter from you last night, I should have written by this post to enquire after your health. How can it be, that you, who are not stationary like me, but often change your situation and mix with a variety of company, should suppose me furnished with such abundant materials, and yourself destitute? I assure you faithfully, that I do not find the soil of Olney prolific in the growth of such articles as make letter-writing a desirable employment. No place contributes less to the catalogue of incidents, or is more scantily supplied with anecdotes worth notice.

We have

One parson, one poet, one belman, one crier,  
And the poor poet is our only 'squire.

Guess then if I have not more reason to expect two letters from you, than you one from me. The principal occurrence, and that which affects me most at present, came to pass this moment. The stair-foot



door being swelled by the thaw, would do any thing better than it would open. An attempt to force it upon that office has been attended with such a horrible dissolution of its parts, that we were immediately obliged to introduce a chirurgion, commonly called a carpenter, whose applications we have some hope will cure it of a locked jaw, and heal its numerous fractures. His medicines are powerful chalybeates, and a certain glutinous salve, which he tells me is made of the tails and ears of animals. The consequences however are rather unfavourable to my present employment, which does not well brook noise, bustle, and interruption.

This being the case, I shall not perhaps be either so perspicuous, or so diffuse, on the subject of which you desire my sentiments, as I should be ; but I will do my best. Know then that I have learnt long since, of Abbé Raynal,<sup>1</sup> to hate all monopolies, as injurious, howsoever managed, to the interests of commerce at large : consequently the charter in question would not at any rate be a favourite of mine. This however is of itself I confess no sufficient reason to justify the resumption of it. But such reasons I think are not wanting. A grant of that kind, it is well known, is always forfeited by the nonperformance of the conditions. And why not equally forfeited, if those conditions are exceeded, if the design of it be per-

<sup>1</sup> Author of *Histoire philosophique et politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes*, published in 1772. The book was translated into English.

verted, and its operation extended to objects which were never in the contemplation of the donor? This appears to me to be no misrepresentation of their case, whose charter is supposed to be in danger. It constitutes them a trading company, and gives them an exclusive right to traffic in the East Indies. But it does no more. It invests them with no sovereignty; it does not convey to them the royal prerogative of making war and peace, which the king cannot alienate if he would. But this prerogative they have exercised, and, forgetting the terms of their institution, have possessed themselves of an immense territory, which they have ruled with a rod of iron, to which it is impossible they should ever have a right, unless such a one as it is a disgrace to plead,—the right of conquest. The potentates of this country they dash in pieces like a potter's vessel, as often as they please, making the happiness of thirty millions of mankind a consideration subordinate to that of their own emolument, oppressing them as often as it may serve a lucrative purpose, and in no instance, that I have ever heard, consulting their interest or advantage. That government therefore is bound to interfere, and to unking these tyrants, is to me self-evident. And if having subjugated so much of this miserable world, it is therefore necessary that we must keep possession of it, it appears to me a duty so binding upon the legislature to rescue it from the hands of those usurpers, that I should think a curse, and a bitter one, must follow the neglect of it.

But suppose this were done, can they be legally deprived of their charter? In truth I think so. If the abuse and perversion of a charter can amount to a defeasance of it, never were they so grossly palpable as in this instance; never was charter so justly forfeited. Neither am I at all afraid that such a measure should be drawn into a precedent, unless it could be alleged as a sufficient reason for not hanging a rogue, that perhaps magistracy might grow wanton in the exercise of such a power, and now and then hang up an honest man for its amusement. When the governors of the bank shall have deserved the same severity, I hope they will meet with it. In the mean time I do not think them a whit more in jeopardy because a corporation of plunderers have been brought to justice.

We are well, and love you all. I never wrote in such a hurry, nor in such disturbance. Pardon the effects, and believe me yours affectionately,

W. C.

#### CXIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Feb. 10, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The morning is my writing time, and in the morning I have no spirits. So much the worse for my correspondents. Sleep, that refreshes my body, seems to

cripple me in every other respect. As the evening approaches, I grow more alert, and when I am retiring to bed, am more fit for mental occupation than at any other time. So it fares with us whom they call nervous. By a strange inversion of the animal economy, we are ready to sleep when we have most need to be awake, and go to bed just when we might sit up to some purpose. The watch is irregularly wound up, it goes in the night when it is not wanted, and in the day stands still. In many respects we have the advantage of our forefathers the Picts. We sleep in a whole skin, and are not obliged to submit to the painful operation of puncturing ourselves from head to foot, in order that we may be decently dressed, and fit to appear abroad. But on the other hand, we have reason enough to envy them their tone of nerves, and that flow of spirits which effectually secured them from all uncomfortable impressions of a gloomy atmosphere, and from every shade of melancholy from every other cause. They understood, I suppose, the use of vulnerary herbs, having frequent occasion for some skill in surgery; but physicians, I presume they had none, having no need of any. Is it possible, that a creature like myself can be descended from such progenitors, in whom there appears not a single trace of family resemblance? What an alteration have a few ages made! They, without clothing, would defy the severest season; and I, with all the accommodations that art has since invented, am hardly secure even in the mildest. If the wind blows upon me when my pores are open,

I catch cold. A cough is the consequence. I suppose if such a disorder could have seized a Pict, his friends would have concluded that a bone had stuck in his throat, and that he was in some danger of choking. They would perhaps have addressed themselves to the cure of his cough by thrusting their fingers into his gullet, which would only have exasperated the case. But they would never have thought of administering laudanum, my only remedy. For this difference however that has obtained between me and my ancestors, I am indebted to the luxurious practices, and enfeebling self-indulgence, of a long line of grandsires, who from generation to generation have been employed in deteriorating the breed, till at last the collected effects of all their follies have centred in my puny self,—a man indeed, but not in the image of those that went before me ;—a man, who sighs and groans, who wears out life in dejection and oppression of spirits, and who never thinks of the aborigines of the country to which he belongs, without wishing that he had been born among them. The evil is without a remedy, unless the ages that are passed could be recalled, my whole pedigree be permitted to live again, and being properly admonished to beware of enervating sloth and refinement, would preserve their hardiness of nature unimpaired, and transmit the desirable quality to their posterity. I once saw Adam in a dream. We sometimes say of a picture, that we doubt not its likeness to the original, though we never saw him ; a judgement we have some reason to form, when the face is strongly



charactered, and the features full of expression. So I think of my visionary Adam, and for a similar reason. His figure was awkward indeed in the extreme. It was evident that he had never been taught by a Frenchman to hold his head erect, or to turn out his toes ; to dispose gracefully of his arms, or to simper without a meaning. But if Mr. Bacon was called upon to produce a statue of Hercules, he need not wish for a juster pattern. He stood like a rock ; the size of his limbs, the prominence of his muscles, and the height of his stature, all conspired to bespeak him a creature whose strength had suffered no diminution ; and who, being the first of his race, did not come into the world under a necessity of sustaining a load of infirmities, derived to him from the intemperance of others. He was as much stouter than a Pict, as I suppose a Pict to have been than I. Upon my hypothesis, therefore, there has been a gradual declension, in point of bodily vigour, from Adam down to me : at least if my dream were a just representation of that gentleman, and deserve the credit I cannot help giving it, such must have been the case.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 19, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I wish it were in my power to give you any account

of the Marquis Caraccioli. Some years since I saw a short history of him in the *Review*, of which I recollect no particulars, except that he was (and for aught I know may be still) an officer in the Prussian service. I have two volumes of his works, lent me by Lady Austen. One is upon the subject of self-acquaintance, and the other treats of the art of conversing with the same gentleman. Had I pursued my purpose of translating him, my design was to have furnished myself, if possible, with some authentic account of him, which I suppose may be procured at any bookseller's who deals in foreign publications. But for the reasons given in my last I have laid aside the design. There is something in his style that touches me exceedingly, and which I do not know how to describe. I should call it pathetic, if it were occasional only, and never occurred but when his subject happened to be particularly affecting. But it is universal; he has not a sentence that is not marked with it. Perhaps therefore I may describe it better by saying, that his whole work has an air of pious and tender melancholy, which to me at least is extremely agreeable. This property of it, which depends perhaps altogether upon the arrangement of his words, and the modulation of his sentences, it would be very difficult to preserve in a translation. I do not know that our language is capable of being so managed, and rather suspect that it is not, and that it is peculiar to the French, because it is not unfrequent among their writers, and I never saw any thing similar to it in our own.

I converse, you say, upon other subjects, than that of despair, and may therefore write upon others. Indeed, my friend, I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company ; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so ; always, indeed, when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start any thing myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind, make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery ; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it. But you will easily perceive that a mind thus occupied is but indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters. The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind are to me forbidden fruit ;—I tremble if I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party in such discourse. The consequence has been, dissatisfaction and self-reproach. You will tell me, perhaps, that I have written upon these subjects in verse, and may, therefore, if I please, in prose. But there is a difference. The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty ; they

amuse, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none. There are, however, subjects that do not always terrify me by their importance; such, I mean, as relate to Christian life and manners; and when such an one presents itself, and finds me in a frame of mind that does not absolutely forbid the employment, I shall most readily give it my attention, for the sake, however, of your request merely. Verse is my favourite occupation, and what I compose in that way, I reserve for my own use hereafter.

My evenings are devoted to books. I read aloud for the entertainment of the party, thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times.

I have lately finished eight volumes of Johnson's *Prefaces, or Lives of the Poets*. In all that number I observe but one man,—a poet of no great fame,—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there, whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, "I have but one book, but it is the best." Of him, therefore, there are some hopes.

But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn:—that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love; she is much obliged to Mrs. Newton for the care she has taken about the worsted. She had no suspicion that Mrs. Newton had forgot it, but supposed her correspondent might. We are in good health, and waiting as patiently as we can for the end of this second winter. The news is—that the brother of farmer Rush, a very sober young man, was driving his waggon last week to Bedford, and in the way ordered his man forward with the team, saying he would follow him, but he has never been heard of since.—Yours, my dear friends, truly,

WM. C.

## CXVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*March 21, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I thank you for the entertainment you have afforded me. I often wish for a library, often regret my folly in selling a good collection; but I have one in Essex. It is rather remote, indeed, too distant for occasional reference; but it serves the purpose of amusement, and a waggon being a very suitable vehicle for an author, I find myself commodiously supplied. Last night I made an end of reading Johnson's *Prefaces*;



but the number of poets whom he has vouchsafed to chronicle being fifty-six, there must be many with whose history I am not yet acquainted. These, or some of these, if it suits you to give them a part of your chaise, when you come, will be heartily welcome. I am very much the biographer's humble admirer. His uncommon share of good sense, and his forcible expression, secure to him that tribute from all his readers. He has a penetrating insight into character, and a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgement. This remark, however, has his narrative for its object, rather than his critical performance. In the latter, I do not think him always just, when he departs from the general opinion. He finds no beauties in Milton's *Lycidas*. He pours contempt upon Prior, to such a degree, that were he really as undeserving of notice as he represents him, he ought no longer to be numbered among the poets. These, indeed, are the two capital instances in which he has offended me. There are others less important, which I have not room to enumerate, and in which I am less confident that he is wrong. What suggested to him the thought that the *Alma*<sup>1</sup> was written in imitation of *Hudibras*, I cannot conceive. In former years, they

<sup>1</sup> The title of one of Prior's poems.

were both favourites of mine, and I often read them ; but never saw in them the least resemblance to each other ; nor do I now, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure. After all, it is a melancholy observation, which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series of poetical lives, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed ! So much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral. What vanity, what petulance in Pope ! How painfully sensible of censure, and yet how restless in provocation ! To what mean artifices could Addison stoop, in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend ! Savage, how sordidly vicious, and the more condemned for the pains that are taken to palliate his vices. Offensive as they appear through a veil, how would they disgust without one. What a sycophant to the public taste was Dryden ; sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation. I know not but one might search these eight volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he.

I shall begin Beattie this evening, and propose to myself much satisfaction in reading him. In him, at least, I shall find a man whose faculties have now and then a glimpse from Heaven upon them ;—a man, not indeed in possession of much evangelical light, but

faithful to what he has, and never neglecting an opportunity to use it. How much more respectable such a character, than that of thousands who would call him blind, and yet have not the grace to practise half his virtues! He, too, is a poet, and wrote the *Minstrel*. The specimens which I have seen of it pleased me much. If you have the whole, I should be glad to read it. I may, perhaps, since you allow me the liberty, indulge myself here and there, with a marginal annotation, but shall not use that allowance wantonly, so as to deface the volumes.

Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart well-cocked fashionable affair. A fashionable hat likewise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip.—Yours, my dear William, W. C.

## CXVII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 29, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It being his majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the

parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys halloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss<sup>1</sup> was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr. Grenville advancing toward me shook me by the hand

<sup>1</sup> His tame hare.

with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the drapier, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a ribband from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of



it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town however seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner perhaps was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not I suppose have been bound to produce them.

Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurts him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended: but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and tears away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our

united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs.  
Newton's affectionate and faithful

W. C.

M. U.

## CXVIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*April 5, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

The hat which I desired you to procure for me, I now write to desire that you will not procure. Do not hastily infer that I mean to go about bareheaded: the whole of the matter is, that a readier method of supply has presented itself since I wrote.

I thanked you in my last for Johnson; I now thank you, with more emphasis, for Beattie, the most agreeable and amiable writer I ever met with; the only author I have seen whose critical and philosophical researches are diversified and embellished by a poetical imagination, that makes even the driest subject, and the leanest, a feast for an epicure in books. He is so much at his ease too, that his own character appears in every page, and which is very rare, we see not only the writer but the man: and that man so gentle, so well-tempered, so happy in his religion, and so humane in his philosophy, that it is necessary to love him, if one has the least sense of what is lovely. If you have not his poem called *The Minstrel* and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me; for though I cannot afford to deal largely in so

expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie.

I have read six of Blair's *Lectures*, and what do I say of Blair? That he is a sensible man, master of his subject, and excepting here and there a Scotticism, a good writer, so far at least as perspicuity of expression, and method, contribute to make one. But oh the sterility of that man's fancy! if indeed he has any such faculty belonging to him. Perhaps philosophers, or men designed for such, are sometimes born without one; or perhaps it withers for want of exercise. However that may be, Doctor Blair has such a brain as Shakespeare somewhere describes as "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage."

I take it for granted that these good men are philosophically correct (for they are both agreed upon the subject) in their account of the origin of language; and if the Scripture had left us in the dark upon that article, I should very readily adopt their hypothesis for want of better information. I should suppose, for instance, that man made his first effort in speech in the way of an interjection, and that ah, or oh, being uttered with wonderful gesticulation, and variety of attitude, must have left his powers of expression quite exhausted: that in a course of time he would invent names for many things, but first for the objects of his daily wants. An apple would consequently be called an apple, and perhaps not many years would elapse before the appellation would receive the sanction of general use. In this case, and upon this supposition,

seeing one in the hand of another man, he would exclaim with a most moving pathos, "Oh apple!"—Well and good—oh apple! is a very affecting speech, but in the meantime it profits him nothing. The man that holds it, eats it, and *he* goes away with "oh apple" in his mouth, and with nothing better. Reflecting upon his disappointment, and that perhaps it arose from his not being more explicit, he contrives a term to denote his idea of transfer or gratuitous communication, and the next occasion that offers of a similar kind, performs his part accordingly. His speech now stands thus, "O give apple!" The apple-holder perceives himself called upon to part with his fruit, and, having satisfied his own hunger, is perhaps not unwilling to do so. But unfortunately there is still room for a mistake, and a third person being present, he gives the apple to *him*. Again disappointed, and again perceiving that his language has not all the precision that is requisite, the orator retires to his study, and there, after much deep thinking, conceives that the insertion of a pronoun, whose office shall be to signify that he not only wants the apple to be given, but given to himself, will remedy all defects, he uses it the next opportunity, and succeeds to a wonder, obtains the apple, and by his success such credit to his invention, that pronouns continue to be in great repute ever after.

Now as my two syllablemongers, Beattie and Blair, both agree that language was originally inspired, and that the great variety of languages we find upon earth

at present took its rise from the confusion of tongues at Babel, I am not perfectly convinced that there is any just occasion to invent this very ingenious solution of a difficulty, which Scripture has solved already. My opinion however is, if I may presume to have an opinion of my own, so different from theirs who are so much wiser than myself, that if man had been his own teacher, and had acquired his words and his phrases only as necessity or convenience had prompted, his progress must have been considerably slower than it was, and in Homer's days the production of such a poem as the *Iliad* impossible. On the contrary, I doubt not that Adam on the very day of his creation was able to express himself in terms both forcible and elegant, and that he was at no loss for sublime diction, and logical combination, when he wanted to praise his Maker.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXIX

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*April 25, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I wish I had both burning words, and bright thoughts, but have at present neither. My head is not itself. Having had an unpleasant night, and a melancholy day, and having already written a long letter, I do not find myself in point of spirits at all qualified either to burn or shine. The post sets out early on Tuesday.



The morning is the only time of exercise with me. In order therefore to keep it open for that purpose, and to comply with your desire of an immediate answer, I give to you as much as I can spare of the present evening. I have also been ill with a rheumatism in my back, which though in a great measure removed, has left an aching sensation behind it, which my present occupation makes me feel more sensibly. Do not imagine that I have a design to enhance the merit of my punctuality by an enumeration of the difficulties under which I observe it. I mean no more than an apology for sending you a sheet, which, when it arrives, you will not find it worthy of your perusal.

Since I despatched my last, Blair has crept a little further into my favour. As his subjects improve, he improves with them ; but upon the whole I account him a dry writer, useful no doubt as an instructor, but as little entertaining as with so much knowledge it is possible to be. His language is, (except Swift's,) the least figurative I remember to have seen, and the few figures found in it are not always happily employed. I take him to be a critic very little animated by what he reads, who rather reasons about the beauties of an author, than really tastes them ; and who finds that a passage is praiseworthy, not because it charms him, but because it is accommodated to the laws of criticism in that case made and provided. I have a little complied with your desire of marginal annotations, and should have dealt in them more largely, had I read the books to myself ; but being reader to the

ladies, I have not always time to settle my own opinion of a doubtful expression, much less to suggest an emendation. I have not censured a particular observation in the book, though when I met with it, it displeased me. I this moment recollect it, and may as well therefore note it here. He is commending, and deservedly, that most noble description of a thunder-storm in the first *Georgic*, which ends with

*Ingeminant austri, et densissimus imber.*

Being in haste, I do not refer to the volume for his very words, but my memory will serve me with the matter. When poets describe, he says, they should always select such circumstances of the subject as are least obvious, and consequently most striking. He therefore admires the effects of the thunderbolt splitting mountains, and filling a nation with astonishment, but quarrels with the closing member of the period, as containing particulars of a storm not worthy of Virgil's notice, because obvious to the notice of all. But here I differ from him; not being able to conceive that wind and rain can be improper in the description of a tempest, or how wind and rain could possibly be more poetically described. Virgil is indeed remarkable for finishing his periods well, and never comes to a stop but with the most consummate dignity of numbers and expression; and in the instance in question I think his skill in this respect is remarkably displayed. The line is perfectly majestic in its march. As to the wind, it is such as only the word *ingeminant*

could describe ; and the words *densissimus imber* give one an idea of a shower indeed, but of such a shower as is not very common, and such a one as only Virgil could have done justice to by a single epithet. Far therefore from agreeing with the Doctor in his stricture, I do not think the *Æneid* contains a nobler line, or a description more magnificently finished.

We are glad that Dr. Conyers has singled you out upon this occasion. Your performance we doubt not will justify his choice : fear not,—you have a heart that can feel upon charitable occasions, and that therefore will not fail you upon this. The burning words come always fast enough, when the sensibility is such as yours.

Thanks for the fish, with its companion a lobster, which we mean to eat to-morrow. We want four Chinese tooth-brushes, they cost a shilling each, the harder the better. Thanks also for the hat, which is greatly admired, and for *The Minstrel*, which I dare say I shall admire no less. Beattie is become my favourite author of all the moderns ; he is so amiable I long to know him.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*April 26, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We are truly sorry that you have been indisposed. It

is well however to have passed through such a season and to have fared no worse. A cold and a sore-throat are troublesome things, but in general an ague is more troublesome; and in this part of the world few have escaped one. I have lately been an invalid myself, and have just recovered from a rheumatic pain in my back, the most excruciating of the sort I ever felt. There was talk of bleeding and blistering, but I escaped with only an embrocation and a box of pills. Mr. Grindon attended me, who though he fidgets about the world as usual, is, I think, a dying man, having had some time since a stroke of apoplexy, and lately a paralytic one. His loss will be felt in this country. Though I do not think him absolutely an *Æsculapius*, I believe him to be as skilful as most of his fraternity in the neighbourhood, besides which, he has the merit of being extremely cautious, a very necessary quality in a practitioner upon the constitutions of others.

We are glad that your book runs. It will not indeed satisfy those whom nothing could satisfy but your accession to their party; but the liberal will say you do well, and it is in the opinion of such men only that you can feel yourself interested.

I have lately been employed in reading Beattie and Blair's *Lectures*. The latter I have not yet finished, I find the former the most agreeable of the two, indeed the most entertaining writer upon dry subjects that I ever met with. His imagination is highly poetical, his language easy and elegant, and his manner so familiar

that we seem to be conversing with an old friend, upon terms of the most sociable intercourse, while we read him. Blair is on the contrary rather stiff, not that his style is pedantic, but his air is formal. He is a sensible man, and understands his subjects, but too conscious that he is addressing the public, and too solicitous about his success, to indulge himself for a moment in that play of fancy which makes the other so agreeable. In Blair we find a scholar, in Beattie both a scholar and an amiable man ; indeed so amiable, that I have wished for his acquaintance ever since I read his book. Having never in my life perused a page of Aristotle, I am glad to have had an opportunity of learning more than (I suppose) he would have taught me, from the writings of two modern critics. I felt myself too a little disposed to compliment my own acumen upon the occasion. For though the art of writing and composing was never much my study, I did not find that they had any great news to tell me. They have assisted me in putting my own observations into some method, but have not suggested many, of which I was not by some means or other previously apprized. In fact, critics did not originally beget authors ; but authors made critics. Common sense dictated to writers the necessity of method, connexion, and thoughts congruous to the nature of their subject ; genius prompted them with embellishments, and then came the critics. Observing the good effects of an attention to these items, they enacted laws for the observance of them in time to come, and having



drawn their rules for good writing from what was actually well written, boasted themselves the inventors of an art which yet the authors of the day had already exemplified. They are however useful in their way, giving us at one view a map of the boundaries which propriety sets to fancy; and serving as judges, to whom the public may at once appeal, when pestered with the vagaries of those who have had the hardiness to transgress them.

The candidates for this county have set an example of economy, which other candidates would do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform however which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen could say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a merry andrew's

jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption. Mr. Ashburner was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him,—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it: and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol.

Adieu, my dear friend; writing makes my back ache, and my paper is full. We love you, and are yours,

W. AND M.

## CXXI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is hard upon us striplings who have uncles still living (N.B. I myself have an uncle still alive,) that those venerable gentlemen should stand in our way, even when the ladies are in question; that I, for instance, should find in one page of your letter a hope that Miss Shuttleworth would be of your party, and be told in the next that she is engaged to your uncle. Well, we may perhaps never be uncles; but we may reasonably hope that the time is coming, when others, as young as we are now, shall envy us

the privileges of old age, and see us engross that share in the attention of the ladies to which their youth must aspire in vain. Make our compliments if you please to your sister Elizabeth, and tell her that we are both mortified at having missed the pleasure of seeing her.

Balloons are so much the mode, that even in this country we have attempted a balloon. You may possibly remember that at a place called Weston, little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family whose name is Throckmorton. The present possessor of the estate is a young man whom I remember a boy. He has a wife, who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure grounds, having been favoured with a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of his elder brother, and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by the favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago, I received an invitation in the civilest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I

went. The whole country were there, but the balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was however flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us, than we could possibly have expected; indeed rather more than of any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both,—a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a little distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belong-

ing to the court-yard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us ; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance ; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call, and now and then to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way, neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments ; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry, which must be the consequence of our dining there, there not being a man in the country, except himself, with whom I could endure to associate. They are squires, merely such, purse-proud and sportsmen. But Mr. T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account.

I have told you a long story. Farewell. We number the days as they pass, and are glad that we shall see you and your sister soon.—Yours, &c.

W. C.



## CXXII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*July 3, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I was sorry that I could only take a flying leave of you. When the coach stopped at the door, I thought you had been in your chamber; my dishabille would not otherwise have prevented my running down for the sake of a more suitable parting.

We rejoice that you had a safe journey, and though we should have rejoiced still more had you had no occasion for a physician, we are glad that, having had need of one, you had the good fortune to find him. Let us hear soon that his advice has proved effectual, and that you are delivered from all ill symptoms.

Thanks for the care you have taken to furnish me with a dictionary. It is rather strange that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bard; and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to

read them, when, the judgement and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked.

This change of wind and weather comforts me, and I should have enjoyed the first fine morning I have seen this month with a peculiar relish, if our new tax-maker had not put me out of temper. I am angry with him, not only for the matter, but for the manner of his proposal. When he lays his impost upon horses, he is even jocular, and laughs ; though considering that wheels, and miles, and grooms, were taxed before, a graver countenance upon the occasion would have been more decent. But he provokes me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it ;—Why ? Because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent ! They can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burthened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero ; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all ; a commodity, being once made too expensive for their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. Rejoice, therefore, O ye pennyless ! the minister will indeed send you to bed in the dark, but your remaining halfpenny will be safe ; instead of

being spent in the useless luxury of candlelight, it will buy you a roll for breakfast, which you will eat no doubt with gratitude to the man who so kindly lessens the number of your disbursements, and while he seems to threaten your money, saves it. I wish he would remember, that the halfpenny, which government imposes, the shopkeeper will swell to two-pence. I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lace-makers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months, by the light of a farthing candle, from four in the afternoon till midnight. I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon, upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card-tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pockets of the poor as sacred, and that to tax a people already so necessitous, is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair.

A neighbour of mine, in Silver End, keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden wall, and I am writing in the green-house: it happens that he is this morning most musically disposed, either cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he has just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me; but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.

I send you the goldfinches, with which you will do as you see good. We have an affectionate remembrance of your late visit, and of all our friends at Stock.—  
Believe me ever yours,

W. C.

CXXIII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*August 16, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Had you not expressed a desire to hear from me before you take leave of Lymington, I certainly should not have answered you so soon. Knowing the place, and the amusements it affords, I should have had more modesty than to suppose myself capable of adding any thing to your present entertainments worthy to rank with them. I am not however totally destitute of such pleasures as an inland country may pretend to. If my windows do not command a view of the ocean, at least they look out upon a profusion of mignonette, which, if it be not so grand an object, is however quite as fragrant: and if I have not a hermit in a grotto, I have nevertheless myself in a greenhouse,—a less venerable figure perhaps, but not at all less animated than he: nor are we in this nook altogether unfurnished with such means of philosophical experiment and speculation as at present the world rings with. On Thursday morning last, we sent up a balloon from Emberton meadow. Thrice

it rose, and as oft descended ; and in the evening it performed another flight at Newport, where it went up, and came down no more. Like the arrow discharged at the pigeon in the Trojan games, it kindled in the air, and was consumed in a moment. I have not heard what interpretation the soothsayers have given to the omen, but shall wonder a little if the Newton shepherd prognosticate any thing less from it than the most bloody war that was ever waged in Europe.

I am reading Cook's last voyage, and am much pleased and amused with it. It seems that in some of the Friendly isles, they excel so much in dancing, and perform that operation with such exquisite delicacy and grace, that they are not surpassed even upon our European stages. O ! that Vestris had been in the ship, that he might have seen himself outdone by a savage. The paper indeed tells us that the queen of France has clapped this king of capers up in prison, for declining to dance before her, on a pretence of sickness, when in fact he was in perfect health. If this be true, perhaps he may by this time be prepared to second such a wish as mine, and to think that the durance he suffers would be well exchanged for a dance at Anamooka. I should however as little have expected to hear that these islanders had such consummate skill in an art, that requires so much taste in the conduct of the person, as that they were good mathematicians and astronomers. Defective as they are in every branch of knowledge, and in every other



species of refinement, it seems wonderful that they should arrive at such perfection in the dance, which some of our English gentlemen, with all the assistance of French instruction, find it impossible to learn. We must conclude therefore that particular nations have a genius for particular feats ; and that our neighbours in France, and our friends in the South Sea, have minds very nearly akin, though they inhabit countries so very remote from each other.

Mrs. Unwin remembers to have been in company with Mr. Gilpin at her brother's. She thought him very sensible and polite, and consequently very agreeable.

We are truly glad that Mrs. Newton and yourself are so well, and that there is reason to hope that Eliza is better. You will learn from this letter that we are so, and that for my own part I am not quite so low in spirits as at some times. Learn too, what you knew before, that we love you all, and that I am your affectionate friend,

W. C.

#### CXXIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Sept. 18, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Following your good example, I lay before me a sheet of my largest paper. It was this moment fair and unblemished, but I have begun to blot it, and

having begun, am not likely to cease till I have spoiled it. I have sent you many a sheet that in my judgment of it has been very unworthy of your acceptance, but my conscience was in some measure satisfied by reflecting, that if it were good for nothing, at the same time it cost you nothing, except the trouble of reading it. But the case is altered now. You must pay a solid price for frothy matter, and though I do not absolutely pick your pocket, yet you lose your money, and, as the saying is, are never the wiser; a saying literally fulfilled to the reader of my epistles.

My greenhouse is never so pleasant as when we are just upon the point of being turned out of it. The gentleness of the autumnal suns, and the calmness of this latter season, make it a much more agreeable retreat than we ever find it in summer; when, the winds being generally brisk, we cannot cool it by admitting a sufficient quantity of air, without being at the same time incommoded by it. But now I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort to a bed of mignonette, opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that nature utters are delightful,—at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the

roaring of lions in Africa, or of bears in Russia, very pleasing ; but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except always the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me, without one exception. I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farm-yard, is no bad performer ; and as to insects, if the black beetles, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest ; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble, to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all. Seriously however it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an exact accord has been contrived between his ear, and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited. All the world is sensible of the uncomfortable effect that certain sounds have upon the nerves, and consequently upon the spirits :—and if a sinful world had been filled with such as would have curdled the blood, and have made the sense of hearing a perpetual inconvenience, I do not know that we should have had a right to complain. But now the fields, the woods, the gardens, have each their concert, and the ear of man is for ever regaled by creatures who seem only to please themselves. Even the ears that are deaf to the Gospel, are continually entertained, though without knowing it, by sounds for which they are solely in-

debted to its author. 'There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in Heaven, in those dismal regions perhaps the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make woe itself more insupportable, and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me in good time to draw the reins, and to check the descent of my fancy into deeps, with which she is but too familiar.

Our best love attends you both, with yours,

*Sum ut semper, tui studiosissimus,*

W. C.

# CXXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

Oct. 10, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I send you four quires of verse, which having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not after all found time or industry enough to give the last hand to the points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such

subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming at least at usefulness : it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet ; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear, for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion ;—I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr. Throckmorton,—but the compliment I mean is to Mr. Smith. It is however so managed, that nobody but himself can make the application, and you, to whom I disclose a secret ; a delicacy on my part, which so much delicacy on his obliged me to the observance of.

What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons ; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance, —and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience.



My descriptions are all from nature : not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience : not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could, (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string,) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance ; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible,) it may yet boast, that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency ; to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.

If it pleases you I shall be happy, and collect from your pleasure in it an omen of its general acceptance.  
—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

CXXVI

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Oct. 20, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and

given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgement, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business; and the author must know little of his own heart, who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery, that he had written five thousand lines in vain? The poem however which you have in hand will not of itself make a volume so large as the last, or as a bookseller would wish. I say this, because when I had sent Johnson five thousand verses, he applied for a thousand more. Two years since, I began a piece which grew to the length of two hundred, and there stopped. I have lately resumed it, and (I believe) shall finish it. But the subject is fruitful, and will not be comprised in a smaller compass than seven or eight hundred verses. It turns on the question, whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter. I mean that it shall pursue the track of the former,—that is to say, that it shall visit Stock in its way to publication. My design also is to inscribe it to you. But you must see it first; and if, after having seen it, you should have any objection, though it should be no bigger than the tittle of an *i*, I will deny myself that pleasure, and find no fault with your refusal. I have not been without thoughts of adding *John Gilpin* at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be

amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation : but in this article I am entirely under your judgement, and mean to be set down by it. All these together will make an octavo like the last. I should have told you, that the piece which now employs me, is in rhyme. I do not intend to write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition. If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—"Humph!"—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—"that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not."—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present

day. He may be a man of taste as well as of learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and may serve us, if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors, who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart. . . .

We have to trouble you yet once again in the marketing way. I want a yard of green satin, to front a winter under waistcoat, and your mother a pound of prepared hartshorn. Being tolerably honest folks, it is probable that we shall some time or other pay you all our debts. These and the cream-pot may all come together by the waggon.

I can easily see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of *Alma Mater*, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself therefore under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.

With our best love to you all, I bid you heartily farewell. I am tired of this endless scribblement. Adieu!—Yours,

W. C.

## CXXVII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Oct. 30, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I accede most readily to the justness of your remark on the subject of the truly Roman heroism of the Sandwich islanders. Proofs of such prowess I believe are seldom exhibited by a people who have attained to a high degree of civilization. Refinement and profligacy of principle are too nearly allied, to admit of any thing so noble ; and I question whether any instances of faithful friendship, like that which so much affected you in the behaviour of the poor savage, were produced even by the Romans themselves, in the latter days of the empire. They *had* been a nation whose virtues it is impossible not to wonder at. But Greece, which was to them, what France is to us, a Pandora's box of mischief, reduced them to her own standard, and they naturally soon sunk still lower. Religion in this case seems pretty much out of the question. To the production of such heroism, undebauched nature herself is equal. When Italy was a land of heroes, she knew no more of the true God than her cicisbèos and her fiddlers know now ; and indeed it seems a matter of indifference, whether a man be born under a truth which does not influence him, or under the actual influence of a lie : or if there be any difference between the two cases, it seems to be rather in favour of the



latter ; for a false persuasion, (such as the Mahometan for instance,) may animate the courage, and furnish motives for the contempt of death, while despisers of the true religion are punished for their folly by being abandoned to the last degrees of depravity. Accordingly we see a Sandwich islander sacrificing himself to his dead friend, and our Christian seamen and mariners, instead of being impressed by a sense of his generosity, butchering him with a persevering cruelty that will disgrace them for ever ; for he was a defenceless, unresisting enemy, who meant nothing more than to gratify his love for the deceased. To slay him in such circumstances was to murder him, and with every aggravation of the crime that can be imagined.

I am now reading a book which you have never read, and will probably never read—Knox's *Essays*. Perhaps I should premise, that I am driven to such reading by the want of books that would please me better, neither having any, nor the means of procuring any. I am not sorry, however, that I have met with him ; though when I have allowed him the praise of being a sensible man, and in *his* way a good one, I have allowed him all that I can afford. Neither his style pleases me, which is sometimes insufferably dry and hard, and sometimes ornamented even to an Harveian tawdriness ; nor his manner, which is never lively without being the worse for it : so unhappy is he in his attempts at character and narration. But writing chiefly on the manners, vices, and follies of the modern day, to me he is at least so far useful, as that

he gives me information upon points concerning which I neither *can* nor *would* be informed except by hearsay. Of such information, however, I have need, being a writer upon those subjects myself, and a satirical writer too. It is fit, therefore, in order that I may find fault in the right place, that I should know where fault may properly be found.

I am again at Johnson's in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called *The Task*. I began it about this time twelvemonth, and writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours, have lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller I suppose will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocuses shall peep together. You may assure yourself that I shall take my first opportunity to wait on you. I mean likewise to gratify myself by obtruding my Muse upon Mr. Bacon.

Adieu, my dear friend! we are well, and love you.—  
Yours, and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

## CXXVIII

*An Epistle to Joseph Hill, Esq.*

Dear Joseph,—five and twenty years ago—  
Alas ! how time escapes—'tis even so !—  
With frequent intercourse and always sweet  
And always friendly we were wont to cheat  
A tedious hour,—and now we never meet.  
As some grave gentleman in Terence says,  
( 'Twas therefore much the same in ancient days, )  
Good lack, we know not what to-morrow brings,—  
Strange fluctuation of all human things !  
True. Changes will befall, and friends may part,  
But distance only cannot change the heart :  
And were I call'd to prove the assertion true,  
One proof should serve, a reference to you.

Whence comes it then, that in the wane of life,  
Though nothing have occur'd to kindle strife,  
We find the friends we fancied we had won,  
Though numerous once, reduced to few or none ?  
Can gold grow worthless that has stood the touch ?  
No. Gold they seemed, but they were never such.  
Horatio's servant once, with bow and cringe  
Swinging the parlour door upon its hinge,  
Dreading a negative, and overawed  
Lest he should trespass, begg'd to go abroad.  
Go, fellow !—whither ?—turning short about—  
Nay. Stay at home ;—you're always going out.  
'Tis but a step, sir, just at the street's end.—

For what?—An please you, sir, to see a friend.  
A friend? Horatio cried, and seem'd to start,—  
Yea marry shalt thou, and with all my heart—  
And fetch my cloak, for though the night be raw  
I'll see him too—the first I ever saw.

I knew the man, and knew his nature mild,  
And was his plaything often when a child ;  
But somewhat at that moment pinch'd him close,  
Else he was seldom bitter or morose :  
Perhaps his confidence just then betray'd,  
His grief might prompt him with the speech he made ;  
Perhaps 'twas mere good humour gave it birth,  
The harmless play of pleasantry and mirth.  
Howe'er it was, his language in my mind  
Bespoke at least a man that knew mankind.  
But not to moralize too much, and strain  
To prove an evil of which all complain,  
(I hate long arguments, verbosely spun,)  
One story more, dear Hill, and I have done.  
Once on a time, an Emperor, a wise man,  
No matter where, in China or Japan,  
Decreed that whosoever should offend  
Against the well-known duties of a friend,  
Convicted once, should ever after wear  
But half a coat, and show his bosom bare ;  
The punishment importing this, no doubt,  
That all was naught within, and all found out.  
Oh happy Britain ! we have not to fear  
Such hard and arbitrary measure here ;  
Else could a law like that which I relate,

Once have the sanction of our triple state,  
Some few that I have known in days of old<sup>1</sup>  
Would run most dreadful risk of catching cold.  
While you, my friend, whatever wind should blow,  
Might traverse England safely to and fro,  
An honest man, close-button'd to the chin,  
Broad-cloth without, and a warm heart within.

## CXXIX

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Nov. 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

To condole with you on the death of a mother aged eighty-seven would be absurd ; rather, therefore, as is reasonable, I congratulate you on the almost singular felicity of having enjoyed the company of so amiable, and so near a relation so long. Your lot and mine in this respect have been very different, as indeed in almost every other. Your mother lived to see you rise, at least to see you comfortably established in the world : mine, dying when I was six years old, did not live to see me sink in it. You may remember with pleasure, while you live, a blessing vouchsafed to you so long ; and I, while I live, must regret a comfort of which I was deprived so early. I can truly say, that not a week passes, (perhaps I might with equal veracity

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to his old friends Thurlow and Colman. See p. 254 note.



say a day,) in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short. But the ways of God are equal ;—and when I reflect on the pangs she would have suffered, had she been a witness of all mine, I see more cause to rejoice than to mourn, that she was hidden in the grave so soon.

We have, as you say, lost a lively and sensible neighbour in Lady Austen, but we have been long accustomed to a state of retirement within one degree of solitude, and being naturally lovers of still life, can relapse into our former duality without being unhappy at the change. To me indeed a third is not necessary, while I can have the companion I have had these twenty years.

I am gone to the press again ; a volume of mine will greet your hands some time either in the course of the winter, or early in the spring. You will find it perhaps on the whole more entertaining than the former, as it treats a greater variety of subjects, and those, at least the most, of a sublunary kind. It will consist of a poem, in six books, called *The Task*. To which will be added another, which I finished yesterday, called, I believe, *Tirocinium*, on the subject of education.

You perceive that I have taken your advice, and given the pen no rest.

W. C.

## CXXX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Nov. 27, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

All the interest that you take in my new publication, and all the pleas that you urge in behalf of your right to my confidence, the moment I had read your letter, struck me as so many proofs of your regard; of a friendship, in which distance and time make no abatement. But it is difficult to adjust opposite claims to the satisfaction of all parties. I have done my best, and must leave it to your candour to put a just interpretation upon all that has passed, and to give me credit for it, as a certain truth, that whatever seeming defects, in point of attention and attachment to you, my conduct on this occasion may have appeared to have been chargeable with, I am in reality as clear of all real ones as you would wish to find me.

I send you enclosed, in the first place, a copy of the advertisement to the reader, which accounts for my title, not otherwise easily accounted for;—secondly, what is called an argument, or a summary of the contents of each book, more circumstantial and diffuse by far than that which I have sent to the press. It will give you a pretty accurate acquaintance with my matter, though the tenons and mortises, by which the several passages are connected, and let into each other, cannot be explained in a syllabus;—and lastly, an

extract, as you desired. The subject of it I am sure will please you ; and as I have admitted into my description no images but what are scriptural, and have aimed as exactly as I could at the plain and simple sublimity of the scripture language, I have hopes the manner of it may please you too. As far as the numbers and diction are concerned, it may serve pretty well for a sample of the whole. But the subjects being so various, no single passage can in all respects be a specimen of the book at large.

My principal purpose is to allure the reader, by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis, that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants : and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find them. I have not spared the Universities. A letter which appeared in the *General Evening Post* of Saturday, said to have been received by a general officer, and by him sent to the press, as worthy of public notice, and which has all the appearance of authenticity, would alone justify the severest censure of those bodies, if any such justification were wanted. By way of supplement to what I have written on this subject, I have added a poem, called *Tirocinium*, which is in rhyme. It treats of the scandalous relaxation of discipline, that obtains in almost all schools universally, but especially in the largest, which

are so negligent in the article of morals, that boys are debauched in general the moment they are capable of being so. It recommends the office of tutor to the father, where there is no real impediment; the expedient of a domestic tutor, where there is; and the disposal of boys into the hands of a respectable country clergyman, who limits his attention to two, in all cases where they cannot be conveniently educated at home. Mr. Unwin happily affording me an instance in point, the poem is inscribed to him. You will now I hope command your hunger to be patient, and be satisfied with the luncheon that I send, till dinner comes. That piecemeal perusal of the work, sheet by sheet, would be so disadvantageous to the work itself, and therefore so uncomfortable to me, that, I dare say, you will waive your desire of it. A poem, thus disjointed, cannot possibly be fit for any body's inspection but the author's.

Tully's rule—" *Nulla dies sine lineâ* "—will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another. But I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhyme, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with.

I am obliged to you, and to Mr. Bacon, for your kind remembrance of me when you meet. No artist can excel as he does, without the finest feelings; and every man that has the finest feelings is, and must be, amiable.

Adieu, my dear friend!—Affectionately yours,

W. C.

CXXXI

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Dec. 4, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You have my hearty thanks for a very good barrel of oysters; which necessary acknowledgment once made, I might perhaps show more kindness by cutting short an epistle, than by continuing one, in which you are not likely to find your account, either in the way of information or amusement. The season of the year, indeed, is not very friendly to such communications. A damp atmosphere and a sunless sky will have their effect upon the spirits; and when the spirits are checked, farewell to all hope of being good company, either by letter or otherwise. I envy those happy voyagers, who, with so much ease, ascend to regions unsullied with a cloud, and date their epistles from an extramundane situation. No wonder if they outshine us who poke about in the dark below, in the vivacity of their sallies, as much as they soar above us in their excursions. Not but that I should be very sorry to



go to the clouds for wit : on the contrary, I am satisfied that I discover more by continuing where I am. Every man to his business. Their vocation is, to see fine prospects, and to make pithy observations upon the world below ; such as these, for instance : that the earth, beheld from a height that one trembles to think of, has the appearance of a circular plain ; that England is a very rich and cultivated country, in which every man's property is ascertained by the hedges that intersect the lands ; and that London and Westminster, seen from the neighbourhood of the moon, make but an insignificant figure. I admit the utility of these remarks ; but in the mean time, as I say, *chacun à son goût* ; and mine is rather to creep than fly ; and to carry with me, if possible, an unbroken neck to the grave.—I remain, as ever, your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

## CXXXII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

Dec. 11, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incur the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar. So is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them, would, in my judgement, deserve the name of a copyist, but not of a poet. A judicious and sensible

reader, therefore, like yourself, will not say that my manner is not good, because it does not resemble theirs, but will rather consider what it is in itself. Blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme: and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not. Certainly it was not necessity that compelled them to it. I flatter myself however that I have avoided that sameness with others, which would entitle me to nothing but a share in one common oblivion with them all. It is possible that, as the reviewer of my former volume found cause to say that he knew not to what class of writers to refer me, the reviewer of this, whosoever he shall be, may see occasion to remark the same singularity. At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond, than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit any thing by this volume that I gained by the last.

As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. In such a case, it seemed almost necessary to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me, that because I performed more than my task, therefore *The Task* is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as

big as he at first intended. I might indeed, following the example of the Sunday newsmonger, call it *The Olio*. But I should do myself wrong ; for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion.

For the same reason none of the interior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading, (I should say the introductory,) passage of that particular book, or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the Sofa, *The Gridiron* should have been my title. But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting-post from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better.

*The Time-piece* appears to me, (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you,) to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. The book to which it belongs is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgement, and dealing pretty largely in the *signs* of the *times*, seems to be denominated, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject.

As to the word *worm*, it is the very appellation which Milton himself, in a certain passage of the

*Paradise Lost*, gives to the serpent. Not having the book at hand I cannot now refer to it ; but I am sure of the fact. I am mistaken, too, if Shakespeare's Cleopatra do not call the asp, by which she thought fit to destroy herself, by the same name. But not having read the play these five-and-twenty years, I will not affirm it. They are, however, without all doubt, convertible terms. A worm is a small serpent, and a serpent is a large worm. And when an epithet significant of the most terrible species of those creatures is adjoined, the idea is surely sufficiently ascertained. No animal of the vermicular or serpentine kind is crested, but the most formidable of all.

We do not often see, or rather feel, so severe a frost before Christmas. Unexpected, at least by me, it had like to have been too much for my greenhouse, my myrtles having found themselves yesterday morning in an atmosphere so cold that the mercury was fallen eight degrees below the freezing point.

We are truly sorry for Mrs. Newton's indisposition, and shall be glad to hear of her recovery. We are most liable to colds at this season, and at this season a cold is most difficult of cure.

Be pleased to remember us to the young ladies, and to all under your roof and elsewhere, who are mindful of us.—And believe me, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

Your letters are gone to their address. The oysters were very good.

## CXXXIII

*To Mr. Johnson.*<sup>1</sup>

I did not write the line, that has been tampered with, hastily, or without due attention to the construction of it; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post, and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly, rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them!

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines, which an ear, so nice

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Johnson, Cowper's publisher.



as the gentleman's who made the above mentioned alteration, would undoubtedly condemn ; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum, which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But lest I tire you, I will only add, that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling ; assuring you, that I always write as smoothly as I can ; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it.

## CXXXIV

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*Jan. 22, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The departure of the long frost, by which we were pinched and squeezed together for three weeks, is a most agreeable circumstance. The weather is now (to speak poetically) genial and jocund ; and the appearance of the sun, after so tedious an eclipse, peculiarly welcome. For were it not that I have a gravel-walk about sixty yards long, where I take my daily exercise, I should be obliged to look at a fine day through the window, without any other enjoyment of it ;—a country rendered impassable by frost, that has been at last resolved into rottenness, keeps me so close a prisoner. Long live the inventors and

improvers of balloons ! It is always clear overhead, and by and by we shall use no other road.

How will the Parliament employ themselves when they meet?—to any purpose, or to none, or only to a bad one? They are utterly out of my favour. I despair of them altogether. Will they pass an act for the cultivation of the royal wildernesses? Will they make effectual provision for a northern fishery? Will they establish a new sinking-fund, that shall infallibly pay off the national debt? I say nothing about a more equal representation, because, unless they bestow upon private gentlemen of no property a privilege of voting, I stand no chance of ever being represented myself. Will they achieve all these wonders, or none of them? And shall I derive no other advantage from the great Wittena-Gemot of the nation, than merely to read their debates, for twenty folios of which I would not give one farthing?—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

CXXXV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Feb. 7, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We live in a state of such uninterrupted retirement, in which incidents worthy to be recorded occur so seldom, that I always sit down to write with a

discouraging conviction that I have nothing to say. The event commonly justifies the presage. For when I have filled my sheet, I find that I have said nothing. Be it known to you, however, that I may now at least communicate a piece of intelligence to which you will not be altogether indifferent, that I have received, and revised, and returned to Johnson, the two first proof sheets of my new publication. The business was dispatched indeed a fortnight ago, since when I have heard from him no further. From such a beginning, however, I venture to prognosticate the progress, and in due time the conclusion of the matter.

In the last *Gentleman's Magazine* my *Poplar Field* appears. I have accordingly sent up two pieces more,—a Latin translation of it, which you have never seen, and another on a Rose-bud, the neck of which I inadvertently broke, which, whether you have seen or not, I know not. As fast as Nichols prints off the poems I send him, I send him new ones. My remittance usually consists of two; and he publishes one of them at a time. I may indeed furnish him at this rate, without putting myself to any great inconvenience. For my last supply was transmitted to him in August, and is but now exhausted.

I communicate the following anecdote at your mother's instance, who will suffer no part of my praise to be sunk in oblivion. A certain lord Archibald Hamilton has hired the house of Mr. Small at Clifton, in our neighbourhood, for a hunting seat. There he lives at present with his wife and daughter. They are

an exemplary family in some respects, and I believe an amiable one in all. The Rev. Mr. Jones, the curate of that parish, who often dines with them by invitation on a Sunday, recommended my volume to their reading; and his lordship, after having perused a part of it, expressed to the said Mr. Jones an ardent desire to be acquainted with the author, from motives which my great modesty will not suffer me to particularize. Mr. Jones, however, like a wise man, informed his lordship, that for certain special reasons and causes I had declined going into company for many years, and that therefore he must not hope for my acquaintance. His lordship most civilly subjoined that he was very sorry for it.

“And is that all?” say you. Now, were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish and say—“Yes.”—But having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you and say—“No, that is not all.”—Mr. Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening, as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. “He had wished for many things (he said,) which, at the time when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was, that he might be connected with men of genius and ability;—and in my connexion with this worthy gentleman, (said he, turning to me,) that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified.” You may suppose that

I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead, when I heard this speech ; and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense.

Thus far I proceeded easily enough ; and here I laid down my pen, and spent some minutes in recollection, endeavouring to find some subject, with which I might fill the little blank that remains. But none presents itself. Farewell therefore, and remember those who are mindful of you !

Present our love to all your comfortable fire-side, and believe me ever most affectionately yours,

W. C.

### CXXXVI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

OLNEY, Feb. 19, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am obliged to you for apprising me of the various occasions of delay to which your letters are liable. Furnished with such a key, I shall be able to account for any accidental tardiness, without supposing any thing worse than that you yourself have been interrupted, or that your messenger has not been punctual.

Mr. Teedon has just left us. He came to exhibit to us a specimen of his kinsman's skill in the art of book-binding. The book on which he had exercised his ingenuity was your *Life*. You did not, indeed,



make a very splendid appearance ; but, considering that you were dressed by an untaught artificer, and that it was his first attempt, you had no cause to be dissatisfied. The young man has evidently the possession of talents, by which he might shine both for the benefit of others and for his own, did not his situation smother him. He can make a dulcimer, tune it, play upon it, and with common advantages would undoubtedly have been able to make an harpsichord. But, unfortunately, he lives where neither the one nor the other are at all in vogue. He can convert the shell of a cocoa-nut into a decent drinking-cup ; but when he has done, he must either fill it at the pump, or use it merely as an ornament of his own mantle-tree. In like manner, he can bind a book ; but if he would have books to bind, he must either make them or buy them, for we have few or no literati at Olney. Some men have talents with which they do mischief ; and others have talents with which, if they do no mischief to others, at least they can do but little good to themselves. They are, however, always a blessing, unless by our own folly we make them a curse ; for if we cannot turn them to a lucrative account, they may however furnish us, at many a dull season, with the means of innocent amusement. Such is the use that Mr. Killingworth makes of his ; and this evening we have, I think, made him happy, having furnished him with two octavo volumes, in which the principles and practice of all ingenious arts are inculcated and explained. I make

little doubt that, by the half of it, he will in time be able to perform many feats, for which he will never be one farthing the richer, but by which, nevertheless, himself and his kin will be much diverted.

How much better is he employed than a neighbour of ours has been for many years, whose sole occupation, although he too is naturally ingenious, has centred in filling his glass and emptying it. He is neither unknown nor much known to you, but you remember him by the name of Geary Ball. He is now languishing in a dropsy, and, in the prime of life, labouring under all the infirmities of age. He solaces himself, I am told, with the recollection of somewhat that passed in his experience many years ago, which, although it has been followed by no better fruits than will grow at an alehouse, he dignifies with the name of Conversion. Sows are so converted when they are washed, and give the same evidence of an unchanged nature by returning to the mire. Mr. Perry, whose daughter he married, often visits him, but declares, that of all the insensibles he ever saw, poor Geary is the most completely stupid. So long as he was able to crawl into the street, his journey was to the Royal Oak and home again ; and so punctual were we both, I in cleaning my teeth at my window, and he in drinking his dram at the same time, that I seldom failed to observe him. But both his legs are now blistered, and refuse to assist him in poisoning himself any longer.

Osborn, the Baptist, as Mr. Wilson informed me,

had determined to pay William Penn an official visit as a deacon of the church, for the purpose of imparting to him the sentence of his expulsion, but meeting him accidentally in the street, and discerning both in his gait and in his features, indications of a temper that it might not be safe to irritate, abandoned his purpose for ever. These men both have wives, and neither of them believes the sin and folly of their husbands.

The winter returning upon us at this late season with redoubled severity, is an event unpleasant even to us who are well furnished with fuel, and seldom feel much of it, unless when we step into bed or get out of it ; but how much more formidable to the poor ! When ministers talk of resources, that word never fails to send my imagination into the mud-wall cottages of our poor at Olney. There I find assembled in one individual, the miseries of age, sickness, and the extremest penury. We have many such instances around us. The parish, perhaps, allows such a one a shilling a week ; but, being numbed with cold, and crippled by disease, she cannot possibly earn herself another. Such persons, therefore, suffer all that famine can inflict upon them, only that they are not actually starved ; a catastrophe which, to many of them, I suppose, would prove a happy release. One cause of all this misery is, the exorbitant taxation with which the country is encumbered ; so that, to the poor, the few pence they are able to procure have almost lost their value. Yet the budget will be opened soon, and soon we shall hear of resources. But I could conduct the states-

man, who rolls down to the House in a chariot as splendid as that of Phaeton, into scenes that, if he had any sensibility for the woes of others, would make him tremble at the mention of the word.—This, however, is not what I intended when I began this paragraph. I was going to observe, that of all the winters we have passed at Olney, and this is the seventeenth, the present has confined us most. Thrice, and but thrice, since the middle of October, have we escaped into the fields for a little fresh air, and a little change of motion. The last time, indeed, it was at some peril that we did it, Mrs. Unwin having slipped into a ditch, and, though I performed the part of an active 'squire upon the occasion, escaped out of it upon her hands and knees.

If the town afford any other news than I here send you, it has not reached me yet. I am in perfect health, at least of body, and Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. Adieu! We remember you always, you and yours, with as much affection as you can desire; which being said, and said truly, leaves me quite at a loss for any other conclusion than that of

WM. COWPER.

CXXXVII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*March 19, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You will wonder, no doubt, when I tell you that



I write upon a card-table ; and will be still more surprised when I add, that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you, perhaps, when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit : for I have heard you say, that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table, which we formerly had in use, was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and, by a variety of inconvenient tricks, disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small ; the square dining-table, too heavy and too large, occupying, when its leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour ; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my purpose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber ; the card-table, which is covered with green baize, and is, therefore, preferable to any other that has a slippery surface ; the card-table, that stands firm and never totters,—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions ; and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others. It



has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass : for, when covered with a table-cloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned ; and not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still, to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as any thing that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escorial capacity.—Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture, a sharp splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens, unfortunately, to be on that side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail : but the needle sets all to rights ; and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival.

Clean roads and milder weather have once more released us, opening a way for our escape into our accustomed walks. We have both, I believe, been sufferers by such a long confinement. Mrs. Unwin has had a nervous fever all the winter, and I a

stomach that has quarrelled with every thing, and not seldom even with its bread and butter. Her complaint, I hope, is at length removed ; but mine seems more obstinate, giving way to nothing that I can oppose to it, except just in the moment when the opposition is made. I ascribe this malady—both our maladies, indeed—in a great measure, to our want of exercise. We have each of us practised more, in other days, than lately we have been able to take ; and for my own part, till I was more than thirty years old, it was almost essential to my comfort to be perpetually in motion. My constitution, therefore, misses, I doubt not, its usual aids of this kind ; and unless, for purposes which I cannot foresee, Providence should interpose to prevent it, will probably reach the moment of its dissolution the sooner for being so little disturbed. A vitiated digestion, I believe, always terminates, if not cured, in the production of some chronical disorder. In several I have known it produce a dropsy. But no matter. Death is inevitable ; and whether we die to-day or to-morrow, a watery death or a dry one, is of no consequence. The state of our spiritual health is all. Could I discover a few more symptoms of convalescence there, this body might moulder into its original dust without one sigh from me. Nothing of all this did I mean to say ; but I have said it, and must now seek another subject.

One of our most favourite walks is spoiled. The spinney is cut down to the stumps : even the lilacs and the syringas, to the stumps. Little did I think,

(though indeed I might have thought it,) that the trees which skreened me from the sun last summer would this winter be employed in roasting potatoes and boiling tea-kettles for the poor of Olney. But so it has proved: and we ourselves have, at this moment, more than two waggon loads of them in our wood-loft.

Such various services can trees perform;  
Whom once they skreen'd from heat, in time they warm.

The mention of the poor reminds me of saying, in answer to your application in behalf of the Freemans, that they long since received a portion of their nameless benefactor's annual remittance. Mrs. Unwin sent them more than twelve pounds of beef, and two gallon loaves.

A letter from Manchester reached our town last Sunday, addressed to the Mayor or other chief magistrate of Olney. The purport of it was, to excite him and his neighbours to petition Parliament against the concessions to Ireland that Government has in contemplation. Mr. Maurice Smith, as constable, took the letter. But whether that most respectable personage amongst us intends to comply with the terms of it, or not, I am ignorant. For myself, however, I can pretty well answer, that I shall sign no petition of the sort; both because I do not think myself competent to a right understanding of the question, and because it appears to me, that, whatever be the event, no place in England can be less concerned in it than Olney.

We rejoice that you are all well. Our love attends

Mrs. Newton and yourself, and the young ladies.—I am yours, my dear friend, as usual,

WM. COWPER.

### CXXXVIII

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*March 20, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I thank you for your letter. It made me laugh, and there are not many things capable of being contained within the dimensions of a letter, for which I see cause to be more thankful. I was pleased too to see my opinion of his Lordship's *nonchalance* upon a subject that you had so much at heart, completely verified. I do not know that the eye of a nobleman was ever dissected. I cannot help supposing however that, were that organ, as it exists in the head of such a personage, to be accurately examined, it would be found to differ materially in its construction from the eye of a commoner; so very different is the view that men in an elevated, and in an humble station, have of the same object. What appears great, sublime, beautiful, and important, to you and to me, when submitted to the notice of my lord, or his grace, and submitted too with the utmost humility, is either too minute to be visible at all, or if seen, seems trivial, and of no account. My supposition therefore seems not altogether chimerical.

In two months I have corrected proof sheets to the



amount of ninety-six pages, and no more. In other words, I have received three packets. Nothing is quick enough for impatience, and I suppose that the impatience of an author has the quickest of all possible movements. It appears to me however that at this rate we shall not publish till next autumn. Should you happen therefore to pass Johnson's door, pop in your head as you go, and just insinuate to him, that, were his remittances rather more frequent, that frequency would be no inconvenience to me. I much expected one this evening, a fortnight having now elapsed since the arrival of the last. But none came, and I felt myself a little mortified. I took up the newspaper however, and read it. There I found that the emperor and the Dutch are, after all their negotiations, going to war. Such reflections as these struck me. A great part of Europe is going to be involved in the greatest of all calamities;—troops are in motion,—artillery is drawn together,—cabinets are busied in contriving schemes of blood and devastation,—thousands will perish, who are incapable of understanding the dispute; and thousands, who, whatever the event may be, are little more interested in it than myself, will suffer unspeakable hardships in the course of the quarrel:—Well! Mr. Poet, and how then? You have composed certain verses, which you are desirous to see in print, and because the impression seems to be delayed, you are displeased, not to say dispirited;—be ashamed of yourself! you live in a world in which your feelings may find



worthier subjects ;—be concerned for the havoc of nations, and mourn over your retarded volume when you find a dearth of more important tragedies !

You postpone certain topics of conference to our next meeting. When shall it take place ? I do not wish for you just now, because the garden is a wilderness, and so is all the country around us. In May we shall have asparagus, and plenty of cucumbers, and weather in which we may stroll to Weston ; at least we may hope for it ; therefore come in May ; you will find us happy to receive you, and as much of your fair household as you can bring with you.

We are very sorry for your Uncle's indisposition. The approach of summer seems however to be much in his favour, that season being of all remedies for the rheumatism I believe the most effectual.

I thank you for your intelligence concerning the celebrity of *John Gilpin*. You may be sure that it was agreeable ;—but your own feelings on occasion of that article pleased me most of all. Well, my friend, be comforted ! You had not an opportunity of saying publicly, "I know the Author." But the author himself will say as much for you soon, and perhaps will feel in doing so a gratification equal to your own.

In the affair of face-painting, I am precisely of your opinion.—Adieu,

W. C.

## CXXXIX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*April 9, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In a letter to the printer of the *Northampton Mercury*, we have the following history.—An ecclesiastic of the name of Zichen, German superintendant or Lutheran bishop of Zetterfeldt, in the year 1779 delivered to the Courts of Hanover and Brunswick a prediction to the following purport. That an earthquake is at hand, the greatest and most destructive ever known; that it will originate in the Alps and in their neighbourhood, especially at Mount St. Gothard; at the foot of which mountain, it seems, four rivers have their source, of which the Rhine is one. The names of the rest I have forgotten. They are all to be swallowed up. That the earth will open into an immense fissure, which will divide all Europe, reaching from the aforesaid mountain to the states of Holland; that the Zuyder Sea will be absorbed in the gulf; that the Bristol Channel will be no more: in short, that the North of Europe will be separated from the South, and that seven thousand cities, towns, and villages, will be destroyed. This prediction he delivered at the aforesaid Courts, in the year seventy-nine, asserting, that in February following the commotion would begin, and that by Easter 1786, the whole would be accomplished. Accordingly, between the

fifteenth and twenty-seventh of February, in the year eighty, the public gazettes and newspapers took notice of several earthquakes in the Alps, and in the regions at their foot; particularly about Mount St. Gothard. From this partial fulfilment, Mr. Okely argues the probability of a complete one, and exhorts the world to watch and be prepared. He adds, moreover, that Mr. Zichen was a pious man, a man of science, and a man of sense; and that when he gave in his writing, he offered to swear to it—I suppose, as a revelation from above. He is since dead.

Nothing in the whole affair pleases me so much, as that he has named a short day for the completion of his prophecy. It is tedious work to hold the judgement in suspense for many years; but any body, methinks, may wait with patience till a twelvemonth shall pass away, especially when an earthquake of such magnitude is in question. I do not say that Mr. Zichen is deceived; but if he be not, I will say that he is the first modern prophet who has not both been a subject of deception himself, and a deceiver of others. A year will show.

Mrs. Unwin thanks Mrs. Newton for her letter. We hope that Patty has been falsely accused. But, however that may be, we see great cause to admire either the cogency of her arguments, or her husband's openness to conviction, who, by a single box on the ear, was so effectually assured of the innocence of his wife, as to become more attached to her than ever. For the sake of good husbands, it is to be hoped that

she will keep her nostrum a secret, or communicate it only to ladies in her own predicament, who have need of the most forcible proofs of their integrity.

Our love attends all your family.—Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,  
WM. COWPER.

## CXL

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*April 30, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I return you thanks for a letter so warm with the intelligence of the celebrity of *John Gilpin*. I little thought, when I mounted him upon my Pegasus, that he would become so famous. I have learned also, from Mr. Newton, that he is equally renowned in Scotland, and that a lady there had undertaken to write a second part, on the subject of Mrs. Gilpin's return to London, but not succeeding in it as she wished, she dropped it. He tells me likewise, that the head master of St. Paul's school, (who he is I know not,) has conceived, in consequence of the entertainment that John has afforded him, a vehement desire to write to me. Let us hope he will alter his mind; for should we even exchange civilities upon the occasion, *Tirocinium* will spoil all. The great estimation however in which this knight of the stone-bottles is held, may turn out a circumstance propitious to the volume of which his history will make a part. Those

events that prove the prelude to our greatest success, are often apparently trivial in themselves, and such as seemed to promise nothing. The disappointment that Horace mentions is reversed—We design a mug, and it proves a hogshead. It is a little hard, that I alone should be unfurnished with a printed copy of this facetious story. When you visit London next, you must buy the most elegant impression of it, and bring it with you. I thank you also for writing to Johnson. I likewise wrote to him myself. Your letter and mine together have operated to admiration. There needs nothing more but that the effect be lasting, and the whole will soon be printed. We now draw towards the middle of the fifth book of *The Task*. The man, Johnson, is like unto some vicious horses, that I have known. They would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred, they would kick.—So did he; his temper was somewhat disconcerted: but his pace was quickened, and I was contented.

I was very much pleased with the following sentence in Mr. Newton's last;—"I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication."—Now therefore we are friends again. Now he once more enquires after the work, which, till he had disburthened himself of this acknowledgement, neither he nor I, in any of our letters to each other, ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them, but both



your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail.

You mention Bensley. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like Bensley, (who was but a boy when I left London,) boast of a connexion with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour; and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, I remember, in the life of one of our poets, (I believe of Savage,) says, that he retired from the world, flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he

chooses to be so ; and that he, who neglects the world, will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate, a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again, and discovered a bird's nest, with two tiny eggs in it. By and by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar to that of the parent bird. My nest is in a little nook. Here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectation.—Yours truly,

W. C.

## CXLI

*To Joseph Hill, Esq.*

*June 25, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I write in a nook that I call my *Boudoir*. It is a summerhouse not much bigger than a sedan chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honey-suckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary, now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door, which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles. At

present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer-time, whether to my friends, or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter evenings at Olney. But (thanks to my *Boudoir*!) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred. They acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it.

The last sentence puts me in mind to tell you that I have ordered my volume to your door. My bookseller is the most dilatory of all his fraternity, or you would have received it long since. It is more than a month since I returned him the last proof, and consequently since the printing was finished. I sent him the manuscript at the beginning of last November, that he might publish while the town was full;—and he will hit the exact moment when it is entirely empty. Patience (you will perceive) is in no situation exempted from the severest trials; a remark that may serve to comfort you under the numberless trials of your own.

W. C.

## CXLII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*July 9, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You wrong your own judgement when you represent it as not to be trusted ; and mine, if you suppose that I have that opinion of it. Had you disapproved, I should have been hurt and mortified. No man's disapprobation would have hurt me more. Your favourable sentiments of my book must consequently give me pleasure in the same proportion. By the post, last Sunday, I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth, in which he thanked me for my volume, of which he had read only a part. Of that part, however, he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied ; and adds, that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. I have likewise received a letter from a judicious friend of mine in London, and a man of fine taste, unknown to you, who speaks of it in the same language. Fortified by these cordials, I feel myself qualified to face the world without much anxiety, and delivered in a great measure from those fears which, I suppose, all men feel upon the like occasion.

My first volume I sent, as you may remember, to the Lord Chancellor, accompanied by a friendly but respectful epistle. His Lordship, however, thought it not worth his while to return me any answer, or to

take the least notice of my present. I sent it also to Colman, manager of the Haymarket theatre, with whom I once was intimate. He likewise proved too great a man to recollect me ; and though he has published since, did not account it necessary to return the compliment. I have allowed myself to be a little pleased with an opportunity to show them that I resent their treatment of me, and have sent this book to neither of them. They, indeed, are the former friends to whom I particularly allude in my epistle to Mr. Hill ; and it is possible that they may take to themselves a censure that they so well deserve. If not, it matters not ; for I shall never have any communication with them hereafter.

If Mr. Bates has found it difficult to furnish you with a motto to your volumes, I have no reason to imagine that I shall do it easily. I shall not leave my books unransacked ; but there is something so new and peculiar in the occasion that suggested your subject, that I question whether, in all the classics, can be found a sentence suited to it. Our sins and follies, in this country, assume a shape that Heathen writers had never any opportunity to notice. They deified the dead, indeed, but not in the Temple of Jupiter. The new-made god had an altar of his own ; and they conducted the ceremony without sacrilege or confusion. It is possible, however, and I think barely so, that somewhat may occur susceptible of accommodation to your purpose ; and if it should, I shall be happy to serve you with it.



I told you, I believe, that the spinney has been cut down; and, though it may seem sufficient to have mentioned such an occurrence once, I cannot help recurring to the melancholy theme. Last night, at near nine o'clock, we entered it for the first time this summer. We had not walked many yards in it, before we perceived that this pleasant retreat is destined never to be a pleasant retreat again. In one more year, the whole will be a thicket. That which was once the serpentine walk is now in a state of transformation, and is already become as woody as the rest. Poplars and elms without number are springing in the turf. They are now as high as the knee. Before the summer is ended, they will be twice as high; and the growth of another season will make them trees. It will then be impossible for any but a sportsman and his dog to penetrate it. The desolation of the whole scene is such, that it sunk our spirits. The ponds are dry. The circular one, in front of the hermitage, is filled with flags and rushes; so that, if it contains any water, not a drop is visible. The weeping willow at the side of it, the only ornamental plant that has escaped the axe, is dead. The ivy and the moss, with which the hermitage was lined, are torn away; and the very mats that covered the benches have been stripped off, rent in tatters, and trodden under foot. So farewell, spinney; I have promised myself that I will never enter it again. We have both prayed in it; you for me, and I for you. But it is desecrated from this time

forth, and the voice of prayer will be heard in it no more. The fate of it in this respect, however deplorable, is not peculiar. The spot where Jacob anointed his pillar, and, which is more apposite, the spot once honoured with the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, have long since suffered similar disgrace, and are become common ground.

There is great severity in the application of the text you mention—I am *their music*. But it is not the worse for that. We both approve it highly. The other in Ezekiel does not seem quite so pat. The prophet complains that his word was to the people like a pleasant song, heard with delight, but soon forgotten. At the commemoration,<sup>1</sup> I suppose that the word is nothing, but the music all in all. The Bible, however, will abundantly supply you with applicable passages. All passages, indeed, that animadvert upon the profanation of God's house and worship, seem to present themselves upon the occasion.

We have returned thanks to Mr. Wm. Unwin for a turbot and lobster, and he disclaims all right to the acknowledgement. Is it due to you and Mrs. Newton? If it be, accept a grateful one, accept likewise our love and best wishes; and believe me, my dear friend, with warm and true affection, yours,

WM. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> The musical commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey, May 1784. Cowper regarded it as a profanation of the sacred building. He refers to the subject in a letter to the Rev. William Unwin (vol. v. pp. 101 *sq.* of Southey's edition).

## CXLIH

*To the Rev. William Unwin.**July 27, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

You and your party left me in a frame of mind that indisposed me much to company. I comforted myself with the hope that I should spend a silent day, in which I should find abundant leisure to indulge sensations which, though of the melancholy kind, I yet wished to nourish. But that hope proved vain. In less than an hour after your departure, Mr. Greatheed made his appearance at the greenhouse door. We were obliged to ask him to dinner, and he dined with us. He is an agreeable, sensible, well-bred young man; but with all his recommendations I felt that on that occasion I could have spared him. So much better are the absent, whom we love much, than the present whom we love a little. I have however made myself amends since, and nothing else having interfered, have sent many a thought after you.

You had been gone two days when a violent thunderstorm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap, so that the explosion was (I suppose) perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occasion constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event

never fails to affect me with ;—the moment that he heard the thunder, (which was like the burst of a great gun,) with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked ; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once ; and so precisely in the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and to end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner, at such a time, but Mungo it seems is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours was the mark to which the lightning was directed ; it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed ;—it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more ; but I have seen a woeful end of many such conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney since I have known the place ; and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. You have left behind you Thomson's *Seasons*, and a bottle of hartshorn. I will not promise that you shall ever see the latter again ; having a sorethroat, I made free with part of it this morning, in the way of outward application, and we shall probably find a use for the remainder. *The Seasons* you shall have again.

I have received, since you went, two very flattering letters of thanks, one from Mr. Bacon, and one from

Mr. Barham, such as might make a lean poet plump, and an humble poet proud. But being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect that they had, than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you, not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also. We are now going to walk, and thus far I have written before I have received your letter. Friday.—I must now be as compact as possible. When I began, I designed four sides, but my packet being transformed into two single epistles, I can consequently afford you but three. I have filled a large sheet with animadversions upon Pope, and shall send it by Sunday's post, indifferent whether Nichols detects me or not. I am proceeding in my translation—" *Velis et remis, omnibus nervis* "—as *Hudibras* has it; and if God give me health and ability, will put it into your hands when I see you next.

Your fish was good,—perfectly good, and we did not forget you in our cups. The money was found, and not a farthing had eloped. My hat is come, and we both admire it; but your mother's either was never sent, or sent the wrong way, for it has not reached us. Tell John that I love him with all my heart for doing so much credit to his tutor, and to my public recommendation of the very plan upon which he is educated.

Mr. Teedon has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I



do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion.

Be not sorry that your love of Christ was excited in you by a picture. Could a dog or a cat suggest to me the thought that Christ is precious, I would not despise that thought because a dog or a cat suggested it. The meanness of the instrument cannot debase the nobleness of the principle. He that kneels before a picture of Christ, is an idolater: but he in whose heart the sight of such a picture kindles a warm remembrance of the Saviour's sufferings, must be a Christian. Suppose that I dream as Gardiner did, that Christ walks before me, that he turns and smiles upon me, and fills my soul with ineffable love and joy; will a man tell me that I am deceived, that I ought not to love or rejoice in him for such a reason, because a dream is merely a picture drawn upon the imagination? I hold not with such divinity. To love Christ is the greatest dignity of man, be that affection wrought in him how it may.

Adieu! May the blessing of God be upon you all! It is your mother's heart's wish and mine.—Yours ever,

W. C.

P.S.—You had hardly reached Emberton when Mr. Teedon came to charge us with his thanks to Miss Unwin for her goodness to him; the poor man looked so humble and grateful, that I forgave him all his past intrusions. I beseech you, therefore, that

you transmit his acknowledgments to his kind benefactress.

## CXLIV

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Sept. 24, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am sorry that an excursion, which you would otherwise have found so agreeable, was attended with so great a drawback upon its pleasures as Miss Cunningham's illness must needs have been. Had she been able to bathe in the sea, it might have been of service to her; but I knew her weakness and delicacy of habit to be such as did not encourage any very sanguine hopes that the regimen would suit her. I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather.

How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I;—I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was, when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the *Harriet*.

In my last, I wrote you word that Mr. Perry was given over by his friends, and pronounced a dead

man by his physician. Just when I had reached the end of the foregoing paragraph, he came in. His errand hither was to bring two letters, which I enclose ; one is to yourself, in which he will give you, I doubt not, such an account both of his body and mind, as will make all that I might say upon those subjects superfluous. The only consequences of his illness seem to be, that he looks a little pale, and that though always a most excellent man, he is still more angelic than he was. Illness sanctified is better than health. But I know a man who has been a sufferer by a worse illness than his, almost these fourteen years, and who at present is only the worse for it.

Mr. Scott called upon us yesterday : he is much inclined to set up a Sunday School, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has had one some time at Clifton ; and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure, that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners, in the lower class of mankind, can be brought to pass ; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children ; an assertion no where oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney ; where children, seven years of age, infest the

streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well, indeed, if in some instances their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is, therefore, doubtless an act of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not, at least, that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose revenues need improvement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction.

I understand that Mr. Jones is in London; it is possible that you may have seen him, and if you have, are better acquainted with his present intentions respecting Lord Peterborough than myself. We saw him, not long since, when he talked of resigning his office immediately; but I hear that he was afterwards otherwise advised, and repented of his purpose. I think it great pity that he did. A thing that a man had better never have touched cannot too soon be relinquished. While his principal kept himself at a distance, his connexion with him was less offensive; but now to all who interest themselves in his conduct as a minister of the gospel, it is an offence indeed.



He seems aware of it, and we hope, therefore, will soon abandon it.

Mrs. Unwin hopes that a hare, which she sent before Mrs. Newton went her journey, arrived safe. By this week's coach she also sent three fowls and a ham, with cabbages, of whose safe arrival she will likewise be glad to hear. She has long been troubled with a pain in her side, which we take to be of the spasmodic kind, but is otherwise well. She joins with me in love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, and to the young ladies ; neither do we forget Sally Johnson.—Believe me, my dear friend, with true affection, yours,

W. C.

Hannah desires me to give her duty to Miss Cunningham and to Miss Catlett.

## CXLV

*To Lady Hesketh.*

*Oct. 12, 1785.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

It is no new thing with you to give pleasure ; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all

grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more, are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I

should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself ; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof, that he could give, of a judgement that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me : that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true ; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary ; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject ; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's

good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much ; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also ; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be

thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.—Yours, my dear friend, and cousin,

W. C.

## CXLVI

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Nov. 5, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Were it with me as in days past, you should have no cause to complain of my tardiness in writing. You supposed that I would have accepted your packet as an answer to my last ; and so indeed I did and felt myself overpaid,—but though a debtor, and deeply indebted too, had not wherewithal to discharge the arrear. You do not know nor suspect what a conquest I sometimes gain, when I only take up the pen with a design to write. Many a time have I resolved to say to all my few correspondents,—“ I take my leave of you for the present ; if I live to see better days, you shall hear from me again.” I have been driven to the very verge of this measure ; and, even upon this occasion, was upon the point of desiring Mrs. Unwin to become my substitute. She, indeed, offered to write in my stead ; but fearing that you would understand me to be even worse than I am, I rather chose to answer for myself. So much for a subject with which I could easily fill the sheet, but with which I have



occupied too great a part of it already. It is time that I should thank you, and return you Mrs. Unwin's thanks for your Narrative. I told you, in my last, in what manner I felt myself affected by the abridgement of it contained in your letter ; and have therefore only to add, upon that point, that the impression made upon me by the relation at large was of a like kind. I envy all that live in the enjoyment of a good hope, and much more all who die to enjoy the fruit of it : but I recollect myself in time ; I resolved not to touch that chord again, and yet was just going to trespass upon my resolution. As to the rest, your history of your happy niece is just what it should be,—clear, affectionate, and plain ; worthy of her, and worthy of yourself. How much more beneficial to the world might such a memorial of an unknown, but pious and believing child, eventually prove, would the supercilious learned condescend to read it, than the history of all the kings and heroes that ever lived ! But the world has its objects of admiration, and God has objects of his love. Those make a noise and perish ; and these weep silently for a short season, and live for ever. I had rather have been your niece, or the writer of her story, than any Cæsar that ever thundered.

The vanity of human attainments was never so conspicuously exemplified as in the present day. The sagacious moderns make discoveries, which, how useful they may prove to themselves I know not ; certainly they do no honour to the ancients. Homer and Virgil have enjoyed, (if the dead have any such

enjoyments,) an unrivalled reputation as poets through a long succession of ages : but it is now shrewdly suspected that Homer did not compose the poems for which he has been so long applauded ; and it is even asserted by a certain Robert Heron, Esq. that Virgil never wrote a line worth reading. He is a pitiful plagiarist ; he is a servile imitator, a bungler in his plan, and has not a thought in his whole work that will bear examination. In short, he is any thing but what the literati for two thousand years have taken him to be—a man of genius, and a fine writer. I fear that Homer's case is desperate. After the lapse of so many generations, it would be a difficult matter to elucidate a question which time and modern ingenuity together combine to puzzle. And I suppose that it were in vain for an honest plain man to enquire, “ If Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, who did ? ” The answer would undoubtedly be—“ It is no matter ; he did not : which is all that I undertook to prove.” For Virgil, however, there still remains some consolation. The very same Mr. Heron, who finds no beauties in the *Æneid*, discovers not a single instance of the sublime in Scripture. Particularly, he says, speaking of the prophets, that Ezekiel, although the filthiest of all writers, is the best of them. He, therefore, being the first of the learned who has reprobated even the style of the Scriptures, may possibly make the fewer proselytes to his judgement of a heathen writer. For my own part, at least, had I been accustomed to doubt whether the *Æneid* were a noble composition or

not, this gentleman would at once have decided the question for me ; and I should have been immediately assured, that a work must necessarily abound in beauties that had the happiness to displease a censurer of the Word of God. What enterprises will not an inordinate passion for fame suggest ? It prompted one man to fire the Temple of Ephesus ; another, to fling himself into a volcano ; and now has induced this wicked and unfortunate squire either to deny his own feelings, or to publish to all the world that he has no feelings at all.

This being the fifth of November, is the worst of all days in the year for letter-writing. Continually called upon to remember the bonfire, one is apt to forget every thing else. The boys at Olney have likewise a very entertaining sport, which commences annually upon this day : they call it Hockey ; and it consists in dashing each other with mud, and the windows also, so that I am forced to rise now and then, and to threaten them with a horsewhip, to preserve our own. We know that the Roman boys whipped tops, trundled the hoop, and played at tennis ; but I believe we nowhere read that they delighted in these filthy aspersions : I am inclined, therefore, to give to the slovenly but ingenious youths of Olney full credit for the invention. It will be well if the Sunday school may civilize them to a taste for more refined amusements. That measure is so far in forwardness that a subscription is made : but it amounts, I am told, to no more than nineteen pounds : a feeble beginning, which,

as taxes are continually growing, promises no long duration.

We have lost our noble neighbours: Lord Peterborough and his lady are gone; and gone to return no more. Mr. Throckmorton was so much displeased with his steward, Mr. Morley, for letting them his house, that he had almost dismissed him from his service. He is not likely, indeed, to keep it long: having made too free with spirituous liquors, his legs begin to swell, and he is going fast into a dropsy.

Mr. Jones and Lord Peterborough have parted at last; and, after many bickerings, have parted upon amicable terms. Jones having delivered in an honest account refused to falsify it to the prejudice of his own reputation, and his master threatened him with a lawsuit. But finding him inflexible, and not to be intimidated, he gave him his hand, treated him as a friend, and admitted him into his confidence. It is well for little folks that great folks are apt to be somewhat capricious; they would otherwise, perhaps, be at all times insolent and oppressive alike.

Mr. Scott is pestered with anonymous letters, but he conducts himself wisely; and the question whether he shall go to the Lock or not, seems hasting to a decision in the affirmative.

We are tolerably well: and Mrs. Unwin adds to mine her affectionate remembrances of yourself and Mrs. Newton.—Yours, my dear friend,

W C.

## CXLVII

*To Lady Hesketh.*

OLNEY, Nov. 9, 1785.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on



purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well ; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner-soever you please ; and add moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced,

and do not much exceed my own ; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done : there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years ; I am not indeed grown

gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter : there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me ; accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often !

W. C.

P.S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

## CXLVIII

### *To Lady Hesketh.*

Nov. 30.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Your kindness reduces me to a necessity, (a pleasant one, indeed,) of writing all my letters in the same terms : always thanks,—thanks at the beginning, and thanks at the end. It is, however, I say, a pleasant employment when those thanks are indeed the language of the heart : and I can truly add, that there is no person on earth whom I thank with so much affection as yourself. You insisted that I should give you my

genuine opinion of the wine. By the way, it arrived without the least damage or fracture, and I finished the first bottle of it this very day. It is excellent, and though the wine which I had been used to drink was not bad, far preferable to that. The bottles will be in town on Saturday. I am enamoured of the desk and of its contents before I see them. They will be most entirely welcome. A few years since I made Mrs. Unwin a present of a snuff-box—a silver one; the purchase was made in London by a friend; it is of a size and form that make it more fit for masculine than feminine use. She therefore with pleasure accepts the box which you have sent,—I should say with the greatest pleasure. And I, discarding the leathern trunk that I have used so long, shall succeed to the possession of hers. She says, Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honour her. Now, my cousin, you may depend upon it, as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound. I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as muleish as most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused; but what is to be done now?—If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two would prove me to be a bear indeed.

I will, therefore, summon him to consideration of said stomach, and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result.—I have read Goldsmith's *Traveller* and his *Deserted Village*, and am highly pleased with them both, as well for the manner in which they are executed, as for their tendency, and the lessons that they inculcate.

Mrs. Unwin said to me a few nights since, after supper, "I have two fine fowls in feeding, and just fit for use; I wonder whether I should send them to Lady Hesketh?" I replied, Yes, by all means! and I will tell you a story that will at once convince you of the propriety of doing so. My brother was curate on a time to Mr. Fawkes, of Orpington, in Kent: it was when I lived in the Temple. One morning, as I was reading by the fireside, I heard a prodigious lumbering at the door. I opened it, and beheld a most rural figure, with very dirty boots, and a great coat as dirty. Supposing that my great fame as a barrister had drawn unto me a client from some remote region, I desired him to walk in. He did so, and introduced himself to my acquaintance by telling me that he was the farmer with whom my brother lodged at Orpington. After this preliminary information he unbuttoned his great coat, and I observed a quantity of long feathers projected from an inside pocket. He thrust in his hand, and with great difficulty extracted a great fat capon. He then proceeded to lighten the other side of him, by dragging out just such another, and begged my acceptance of both. I sent them to a tavern, where



they were dressed, and I with two or three friends, whom I invited to the feast, found them incomparably better than any fowls that we had ever tasted from the London coops. Now, said I to Mrs. Unwin, it is likely that the fowls at Olney may be as good as the fowls at Orpington, therefore send them ; for it is not possible to make so good a use of them in any other way.

My dear, I have another story to tell you, but of a different kind. At Westminster School I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course, as I suppose, of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice ;—once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence, a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him, and the more because it was plain that after so long a time he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's ; twice has he visited me in the course of the last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer : he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt

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his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and engaged himself and all his connexions, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door; but when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour his servant came with a letter his master had written at the inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows:—

OLNEY, *Nov.* 30, 1785.

MY GOOD FRIEND,

You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price; which when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavour to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you.—Yours ever,

WALTER BAGOT.

N.B.—It contained a draft for twenty pounds.

My dearest cousin, for whom I feel more than I can say, I once more thank you for all; which reminds me by the way of thanking you in particular for your offer of oysters. I am very fond of them, and few things agree better with me, when they are stewed without butter. You may perceive that I improve upon your hands, and grow less and less coy in the matter of acceptance continually.

In a letter of Mr. Unwin's to his mother he says thus: "I have been gratified to-day by the high character given of my friend's poem in *The Critical Review*." So far, therefore, I have passed the pikes. The Monthly Critics have not yet noticed me.

Adieu! my faithful, kind, and consolatory friend!  
—Ever, ever yours, WM. COWPER.

### CXLIX

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

Dec. 3, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am glad to hear there is such a demand for your last Narrative. If I may judge of their general utility by the effect that they have heretofore had upon me, there are few things more edifying than death-bed memoirs. They interest every reader, because they speak of a period at which all must arrive, and afford a solid ground of encouragement to survivors to expect the same, or similar support and comfort, when it shall be their turn to die.

I also am employed in writing narrative, but not so useful. Employment, however, and with the pen, is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished *The Task*, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and

suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the *Iliad*; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus:—The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together consists of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous

coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured ; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote ; but, among your numerous connexions, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much ; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will.

I have lately had three visits from my old school-fellow Mr. Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot, and of Mr. Chester of Chicheley. At his last visit he brought his wife with him, a most amiable woman, to see Mrs. Unwin. I told him my purpose, and my progress. He received the news with great pleasure ;



immediately subscribed a draft of twenty pounds ; and promised me his whole heart, and his whole interest, which lies principally among people of the first fashion.

My correspondence has lately also been renewed with my dear cousin Lady Hesketh, whom I ever loved as a sister, (for we were in a manner brought up together,) and who writes to me as affectionately as if she were so. She also enters into my views and interests upon this occasion with a warmth that gives me great encouragement. The circle of *her* acquaintance is likewise very extensive ; and I have no doubt that she will exert her influence to its utmost possibilities among them. I have other strings to my bow, (perhaps, as a translator of Homer, I should say, to my lyre,) which I cannot here enumerate ; but, upon the whole, my prospect seems promising enough. I have not yet consulted Johnson upon the occasion, but intend to do it soon.

My spirits are somewhat better than they were. In the course of the last month, I have perceived a very sensible amendment. The hope of better days seems again to dawn upon me ; and I have now and then an intimation, though slight and transient, that God has not abandoned me for ever.

We have paid Nat. Gee his interest, and I enclose his acknowledgement. His last, was so effectually mislaid that we have never found it. Mrs. Unwin, who sends her love, begs that you will pay out of that sum, for the newspapers, and remit, if you can think

of it, the few shillings that will remain, by the first that shall call upon you in his way to Olney. She is sorry that she forgot the greens.

This last paragraph must be considered as in a parenthesis, for I am going back to the subject of the preceding, viz. myself. Having been for some years troubled with an inconvenient stomach; and lately, with a stomach that will digest nothing without help; and we having reached the bottom of our own medical skill, into which we have dived to little or no purpose; I have at length consented to consult Dr. Kerr, and expect to see him in a day or two. Engaged as I am, and am likely to be, so long as I am capable of it, in writing for the press, I cannot well afford to entertain a malady that is such an enemy to all mental operations.

The morning is beautiful, and tempts me forth into the garden. It is all the walk that I can have at this season, but not all the exercise. I ring a peal every day upon the dumb-bells.—I am, my dear friend, most truly, yours and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

CL

*To Lady Hesketh.*

OLNEY, Dec. 6, 1785.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I write not *upon* my desk, but *about* it. Having in

vain expected it by the waggon that followed your letter, I again expected it by the next ; and thinking it likely that it might arrive last night at Sherrington, I sent a man over thither this morning, hoping to see him return with it ; but again I am disappointed. I have felt an impatience to receive it that you yourself have taught me, and now think it necessary to let you know that it is not come, lest it should perhaps be detained in London, by the negligence of somebody to whom you might entrust the packing of it, or its carriage to the inn.

I shall be obliged to be more concise than I choose to be when I write to you, for want of time to indulge myself in writing more. How, will you say, can a man want time, who lives in the country, without business, and without neighbours, who visits nobody, and who is visited himself so seldom ? My dear, I have been at the races this morning, and have another letter to write this evening ; the post sets out at seven, and it is now drawing near to six. A fine day, you will say, for the races, and the better, no doubt, because it has rained continually ever since the morning. At what races do you suppose that I have been ? I might leave you to guess, but loving you too well to leave you under the burthen of an employment that must prove for ever vain, I will even tell you, and keep you no longer in suspense. I have been at Troy, where the principal heroes of the *Iliad* have been running for such a prize as our jockeys would disdain to saddle a horse for ; and yet I assure

you they acquitted themselves most nobly, though a kettle and a frying-pan were to reward their labours.

I never answered your question concerning my strong partiality to a common. I well remember making the speech of which you remind me, and the very place where I made it was upon a common, in the neighbourhood of Southampton, the name of which, however, I have forgot. But I perfectly recollect that I boasted of the sagacity that you mention just after having carried you over a dirty part of the road that led to it. My nostrils have hardly been regaled with those wild odours from that day to the present. We have no such here. If there ever were any such in this country, the enclosures have long since destroyed them ; but we have a scent in the fields about Olney, that to me is equally agreeable, and which, even after attentive examination, I have never been able to account for. It proceeds, so far as I can find, neither from herb, nor tree, nor shrub : I should suppose therefore that it is in the soil. It is exactly the scent of amber when it has been rubbed hard, only more potent. I have never observed it except in hot weather, or in places where the sun shines powerfully, and from which the air is excluded. I had a strong poetical desire to describe it when I was writing the Common-scene in *The Task*, but feared lest the un-frequency of such a singular property in the earth, should have tempted the reader to ascribe it to a fanciful nose, at least to have suspected it for a deliberate fiction

I have been as good as my word, and have sent for the doctor ; but having left him the whole week to choose out of, am uncertain on what day I shall fall under his consideration. I have been in his company. He is quite a gentleman, and a very sensible one ; and as to skill in his profession, I suppose that he has few superiors.

Mrs. Unwin, (who begs to be mentioned to you with affectionate respect,) sits knitting my stockings at my elbow, with a degree of industry worthy of Penelope herself. You will not think this an exaggeration when I tell you that I have not bought a pair these twenty years, either of thread, silk, or worsted.

Adieu, my most beloved cousin ; if you get this before I have an answer to my last, let me soon have an answer to them both.—Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

CLI

*To Lady Hesketh.*

*Dec. 7.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,

At this time last night I was writing to you, and now I am writing to you again. Had our correspondence been renewed a year ago, it is possible that, having found a more agreeable employment, it might never have occurred to me to translate Homer for my



amusement. I have no doubt that my friend Bagot will do his utmost to circulate my proposals. There is a warmth in his manner, and he takes an interest in the success of my enterprise that leaves me without excuse if I should doubt it. But his sphere of influence and yours are entirely distinct. He will recommend me to the men, and you, I suppose, principally to the ladies. The literati will probably have some curiosity to see in what manner I have conducted an attempt in which Pope went before me; but after all, a translation of Homer must be chiefly a lady's book. It just presents itself to me to ask if Mr. Arnott, whose name I have not heard these many years, except from my own lips, be of your connexions? He, I should suppose, has pretty extensive ones himself, and for certain reasons would not unwillingly contribute what he could to the furtherance of a work undertaken by a man who bears my name. But all these matters I leave entirely to your discretion, as secure both of that and your zeal to serve me, as if I were at your side throughout all the business. By the way, a neighbour of ours being this day at Newport, saw a letter addressed to me in the window of the inn, and delivered it to me while I was at dinner. It proved to be a letter from Mr. Bagot, which he had left there in his way home, in hope that it would find a bearer. It is conceived in terms altogether worthy of the friendship that he professes for me, and contains a fresh assurance of his exertions in my favour as soon as I shall have sent him my proposals. He

is a man of taste and of learning, and sees as plainly as I that there is a fair opening for such a work. My intention is to write to Johnson, my publisher, in the course of a few days, in order to settle with him the necessary preliminaries; which done, I shall order him to put the Proposals to the press immediately. The season is favourable,—London is full, or will be so by the time when they shall be ready, which will hardly be till after the holidays, and by that time, if nothing hinders, I shall have finished the *Iliad*. I shall then revise it carefully, comparing it all the way with the original, and shall have given it the last hand probably by the month of March. It is likewise probable that by the month of March we shall have felt our ground a little, and be able to form a reasonable judgement how far the subscription will be likely to fill. For so expensive a business must not be finally determined upon till that be known. If the subscription should fail of the needful amount, I am but where I was, and shall have nothing to do but to return the money, and to comfort myself with reflecting that I have not thrown away another year in translating the *Odyssey* also. But though not naturally addicted to much rashness in making conclusions favourable to myself, I have a certain lightness of heart upon the subject, that encourages me to hope for, and to expect a very different event.

My dear, you say not a word about the desk in your last, which I received this morning. I infer from your silence that you supposed it either at Olney

or on its way thither, and that you expected nothing so much as that my next would inform you of its safe arrival ;—therefore, where can it possibly be? I am not absolutely in despair about it, for the reasons that I mentioned last night ; but to say the truth, I stand tottering upon the verge of it. I write, and have written these many years, upon a book of maps, which I now begin to find too low and too flat, though till I expected a better desk, I found no fault with *them*. See and observe how true it is, that by increasing the number of our conveniencies, we multiply our wants exactly in the same proportion ! neither can I at all doubt that if you were to tell me that all the men in London of any fashion at all, wore black velvet shoes with white roses, and should also tell me that you would send me such, I should dance with impatience till they arrived. Not because I care one farthing of what materials my shoes are made, but because any shoes of your sending would interest me from head to foot.

I have never had the pleasure to see Mr. Jekyll, and probably never shall. I have been repeatedly at Gayhurst ; but we went only to amuse ourselves with a walk in the pleasure-grounds when the family were out. I was last year in company with Mrs. Wright. We met at Mr. Throckmorton's, and were both highly pleased with her ; but Mr. Wright himself is such a keen sportsman that he would doubtless find me a most insipid animal, who have not the least relish of what he admires so much. For the same reason as

well as for some others, I have never had a connexion in the visiting way with any other of the gentlemen in the country. With Mr. Throckmorton indeed I had liked to have formed acquaintance last year, but he left the country soon after we began to know each other, and is in general so little at home that I have no room left to suppose I shall ever know him better.

Mrs. Unwin, my dearest cousin, is *overgowned*, (you remember that word,) that the *pullen*, (you remember that also,) proved so good. She begs me also to say how sensible she is of your kind offer to execute any of her commissions in town; but to say *how* sensible she is of it, would take up more room than I can spare at present, for which reason I decline it. I allot the rest of my paper to Dr. Kerr, whom I shall expect to see to-morrow, or shall conclude that my letter has not reached him. Good night, therefore, my dear! I will fill up the little space that remains when I shall either have to tell you that I have seen him, or must write to him again. I am on the same account obliged to postpone my answer to certain passages in your last, to another opportunity.

Thursday evening.

Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the compactest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that ever were or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington, when the waggoner's

wife, (for the man himself was not at home,) croaked out her abominable *No* ! yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such an *ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank ! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now however only room to say that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more at this distance but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I ? The pocket-book is also the completest that I ever saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant.

Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer.—My dear, yours,

WM. C.

N.B.—I generally write the day before the post sets out, which is the thing that puzzles you. I do it that I may secure time for the purpose, and may not be hurried. On this very day twenty-two years ago left I London.



## CLII

*To the Rev. John Newton.*

*Dec. 10, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

What you say of my last volume gives me the sincerest pleasure. I have heard a like favourable report of it from several different quarters, but never any (for obvious reasons) that has gratified me more than yours. I have a relish for moderate praise, because it bids fair to be judicious; but praise excessive, such as our poor friend ——'s, (I have an uncle also who celebrates me exactly in the same language;) — such praise is rather too big for an ordinary swallow. I set down nine-tenths of it to the account of family partiality. I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died, and had it been worth my while to have given him a hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have been more popular than it is. I am at least very unwilling to esteem *John Gilpin* as better worth than all the rest that I have written, and he has been popular enough.

Your sentiments of Pope's *Homer* agree perfectly with those of every competent judge with whom I have at any time conversed about it. I never saw a copy so unlike the original. There is not, I believe, in all the world to be found an uninspired poem so simple as

those of Homer ; nor in all the world a poem more bedizened with ornaments than Pope's translation of them. Accordingly, the sublime of Homer in the hands of Pope becomes bloated and tumid, and his description tawdry. Neither had Pope the faintest conception of those exquisite discriminations of character for which Homer is so remarkable. All his persons, and equally upon all occasions, speak in an inflated and strutting phraseology, as Pope has managed them ; although in the original, the dignity of their utterance, even when they are most majestic, consists principally in the simplicity of their sentiments and of their language. Another censure I must needs pass upon our Anglo-Grecian, out of many that obtrude themselves upon me, but for which I have neither time to spare, nor room ; which is, that with all his great abilities he was defective in his feelings to a degree that some passages in his own poems make it difficult to account for. No writer more pathetic than Homer, because none more natural ; and because none less natural than Pope in his version of Homer, therefore than he none less pathetic. But I shall tire you with a theme with which I would not wish to cloy you beforehand.

If the great change in my experience, of which you express so lively an expectation, should take place, and whenever it shall take place, you may securely depend upon receiving the first notice of it. But whether you come with congratulations, or whether without them, I need not say that you and yours will always be most

welcome here. Mrs. Unwin's love both to yourself and to Mrs. Newton joins itself as usual, and as warmly as usual, to that of yours, my dear friend, affectionately and faithfully,

WM. COWPER.

The following this moment occurs to me as a possible motto for the Messiah, if you do not think it too sharp:—

— *Nunquam inducunt animum cantare, rogati ;  
Injussi, nunquam desistunt.*

### CLIII

*To Lady Hesketh.*

*Thursday, Dec. 15, 1785.*

DEAREST COUSIN,

My desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all my objections. Before it arrived, Mrs. Unwin had spied out for it a place that exactly suits it. A certain fly-table in the corner of the room, which I had overlooked, affords it a convenient stand when it is not wanted, and it is easily transferred to a larger when it is. If I must not know to whom I am principally indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgements of gratitude and love. As to my frequent use of it, I

will tell you how that matter stands. When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years, (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered,) Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies insist, you know, there is an end of the business; obedience on our part becomes necessary. I accordingly obeyed, but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility, and from that day to this I have never ceased to scrape. Observe, however, my dear, that I scrape not always. My task that I assign myself is to translate forty lines a day; if they pass off easily I sometimes make them fifty, but never abate any part of the allotted number. Perhaps I am occupied an hour and a half, perhaps three hours; but generally between two and three. This, you see, is labour that can hurt no man; and what I have translated in the morning, in the evening I transcribe.

Imagine not that I am so inhuman as to send you into the field with no coadjutor but Mr. Bagot. He is indeed one of my great dependencies, but I have others, and not inconsiderable ones besides. Mr. Unwin is of course hearty in my cause, and he has several important connexions. I have, by his means originally, an acquaintance, though by letters only, with Mr. Smith, member for Nottingham. My whole intercourse with my bookseller has hitherto been

carried on through the medium of his parliamentary privilege. He is pleased to speak very handsomely of my books, and, I doubt not, will assist my subscription with ardour. John Thornton the great, who together with his three sons, all three in parliament, has, I suppose, a larger sweep in the city than any man, will, I have reason to hope, be equally zealous in my favour. Mr. Newton, who has a large influence in that quarter also, will, I know, serve me like a brother. I have also exchanged some letters with Mr. Bacon, the statuary, whose connexions must needs be extensive, and who, if I may judge from the sentiments that he expresses towards me, will not be backward in my service. Neither have I any doubt but that I can engage Lord Dartmouth. These, my dearest cousin, except the last, (and I mention it for your greater comfort,) are all, to a man, Pittites. Mr. Smith, in particular, is one of the minister's most intimate friends, and was with him when the turnpike-man had like to have spoiled him for a premier for ever. All this I have said by way of clapping you on the back, not wondering that your poor heart ached at the idea of being almost a solitary Lady Errant on the occasion.

With respect to the enterprise itself, there are certain points of delicacy that will not suffer me to make a public justification of it. It would ill become me avowedly to point out the faults of Pope in a preface, and would be as impolitic as indecent. But to you, my dear, I can utter my mind freely. Let me



premise, however, that you answered the gentleman's inquiry, whether in blank verse or not, to a marvel. It is even so : and let some critics say what they will, I aver it, and will for ever aver it, that to give a just representation of Homer in rhyme, is a natural impossibility. Now for Pope himself :—I will allow his whole merit. He has written a great deal of very musical and sweet verse in his translation of Homer, but his verse is not universally such ; on the contrary, it is often lame, feeble, and flat. He has, besides, occasionally a felicity of expression peculiar to himself ; but it is a felicity purely modern, and has nothing to do with Homer. Except the Bible, there never was in the world a book so remarkable for that species of the sublime that owes its very existence to simplicity, as the works of Homer. He is always nervous, plain, natural. I refer you to your own knowledge of his copyist for a decision upon Pope's merits in these particulars. The garden in all the gaiety of June is less flowery than his Translation. Metaphors of which Homer never dreamt, which he did not seek, and which probably he would have disdained if he had found, follow each other in quick succession like the sliding pictures in a show box. Homer is, on occasions that call for such a style, the easiest and most familiar of all writers : a circumstance that escaped Pope entirely, who takes most religious care that he shall every where strut in buckram. The speeches of his heroes are often animated to a degree that Pope no doubt accounted unmannerly and rude, for he has

reduced numbers of them that are of that character to the perfect standard of French good-breeding. Shakespeare himself did not excel Homer in discrimination of character, neither is he more attentive to exact consistence and preservation of it throughout. In Pope, to whatever cause it was owing, whether he did not see it, or seeing it, accounted it an affair of no moment, this great beauty is almost absolutely annihilated. In short, my dear, there is hardly any thing in the world so unlike another, as Pope's version of Homer to the original. Give me a great corking pin that I may stick your faith upon my sleeve. There—it is done. Now assure yourself, upon the credit of a man who made Homer much his study in his youth, and who is perhaps better acquainted with Pope's translation of him than almost any man, having twenty-five years ago compared them with each other line by line throughout; upon the credit of a man, too, who would not for the world deceive you in the smallest matter, that Pope never entered into the spirit of Homer, that he never translated him, I had almost said, did not understand him: many passages it is literally true that he did not. Why, when he first entered on his task, did he, (as he did, by his own confession,) for ever dream that he was wandering in unknown ways, that he was lost upon heaths and forests, and awoke in terror? I will tell you, my dear, his dreams were emblems of his waking experience; and I am mistaken, if I could not go near to prove that at his first setting out, he knew very little of Greek, and was

never an adept in it, to the last. Therefore, my beloved cousin, once more take heart. I have a fair opportunity to acquire honour; and if when I have finished the *Iliad*, I do not upon cool consideration think that I have secured it, I will burn the copy.

A hundred things must go unanswered, but not the oysters unacknowledged, which are remarkably fine. Again I leave space for Kerr, not having seen him yet. I cannot go to him now, lest we *should meet in the midway between*.

Saturday.

I must now huddle up twenty matters in a corner. No Kerr yet: a report prevails in our town that he is very ill, and I am very sorry if he is. I were no better than a beast could I forget to thank you for an order of oysters through the season. I love you for all your kindnesses, and for this among the rest. I wrote lately to Johnson on the subject of Homer. He is a knowing man in his trade, and understands book-sellers' trap as well as any man. He wishes me not to publish by subscription, but to put my copy into his hands. He thinks he can make me such proposals as I shall like. I shall answer him to-day, and not depart from my purpose. But I consider his advice as a favourable omen. The last post brought me a very obliging letter from the abovesaid Mr. Smith. I shall answer it to-day, and shall make my intended application for his interest in behalf of my subscription. I always take care to have sufficient exercise every day. When the weather forbids walking, I

ring a thousand bob-majors upon the dumb-bells. You would be delighted to see the performance. Again, I say that I love you, and I do so in particular for the interest that you took in the success of the passages that you say were read in the evening party that you mention. I know the friendly warmth of your heart, and how valuable a thing it is to have a share in it. The hare was caught by a shepherd's-dog that had not the fear of the law before his eyes ; was transferred by the shepherd to the clerk of the parish, and by him presented to us. Mrs. Unwin is ever deeply sensible of your kind remembrances of her. Her son is sometimes in town, and if you permit him, will, I doubt not, rejoice to give a morning rap at your door, upon the first intimation of such permission from me, whenever opportunity shall offer.

Now farewell, my dearest cousin, and deservedly my most beloved friend, farewell.—With true affection yours,

WM. COWPER.

#### CLIV

*To the Rev. William Unwin.*

*Dec. 31, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM

You have learned from my last that I am now conducting myself upon the plan that you recommended to me in the summer. But since I wrote it, I have

made still farther advances in my negotiation with Johnson. The proposals are adjusted. The proof-sheet has been printed off, corrected, and returned. They will be sent abroad as soon as I can make up a complete list of the personages and persons to whom I would have them sent ; which in a few days I hope to be able to accomplish. Johnson behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours, in his own words, "to put something handsome in my pocket," and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not (he says) by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas ; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names (he adds) at this price will put above a thousand pounds into my purse. I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially if so disposed. Mr. Newton is warm in my service, and can do not a little. I have of course written to Mr. Bagot, who, when he was here, with much earnestness and affection entreated me so to do, as soon as I should have settled the conditions. If I could get Sir Richard Sutton's address, I would write to him also, though I have been but



once in his company since I left Westminster, where he and I read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* through together. I enclose Lord Dartmouth's answer to my application, which I will get you to show to Lady Hesketh, because it will please her. I shall be glad if you can make an opportunity to call on her, during your present stay in town. You observe therefore that I am not wanting to myself; he that is so, has no just claim on the assistance of others, neither shall myself have any cause to complain of me in other respects. I thank you for your friendly hints, and precautions, and shall not fail to give them the guidance of my pen. I respect the public, and I respect myself, and had rather want bread than expose myself wantonly to the condemnation of either. I hate the affectation so frequently found in authors, of negligence and slovenly slightness; and in the present case am sensible how especially necessary it is to shun them, when I undertake the vast and invidious labour of doing better than Pope has done before me. I thank you for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the Mann you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed.

I have frequently thought with pleasure of the summer that you have had in your heart, while you have been employed in softening the severity of winter in behalf of so many who must otherwise have been exposed to it. I wish that you could make a general gaol-delivery, leaving only those behind who cannot elsewhere be so properly disposed of. You never said a better thing in your life, than when you assured Mr. Smith of the expediency of a gift of bedding to the poor of Olney. There is no one article of this world's comforts, with which, as Falstaff says, they are so heinously unprovided. When a poor woman, and an honest one, whom we know well, carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children ; as soon as the children saw them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions, of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other.

It just occurs to me, to say, that this manuscript of mine will be ready for the press, as I hope, by the end of February. I shall have finished the *Iliad* in about ten days, and shall proceed immediately to the revisal of the whole. You must, if possible, come down to Olney, if it be only that you may take the charge of its safe delivery to Johnson. For if by any accident

it should be lost, I am undone,—the first copy being but a lean counterpart of the second.

Your mother joins with me in love and good wishes of every kind, to you, and all yours.—Adieu,

W. C.

CLV

*To Lady Hesketh.*

OLNEY,

*Monday, Jan. 2, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

Be under no concern about me or my stomach. The remedy is certainly a most detestable affair, but when taken early in the morning, and without slip-slops, is attended with less labour than could be supposed.

If I did not know that you have a better taste than ninety-nine readers in a hundred, whether of your sex or ours, I should have less pleasure than I have in your approbation. One thing is to be considered, I did not always read Pope's translation with so critical an eye as lately; if, therefore, I spy blemishes that escape you, it is not to be ascribed to my better judgement, but to that closeness of attention that the occasion naturally inspires. I well remember when the lines which have charmed you so long, delighted me as much; and had I not at last examined them by the light of Homer's lamp, their defects, to this moment, had been hidden from me; such a fascinating command of language was Pope endued with. But

Homer's accuracy of description, and his exquisite judgement never, never failed him. He never, I believe, in a single instance sacrificed beauty to embellishment. He does not deal in hyperbole, (a figure so frequently occurring in his translator, that one would imagine it Homer's favourite one ;) accordingly, when he describes nature, whether in man or in animal, or whether nature inanimate, you may always trust him for the most consummate fidelity. It is his great glory that he omits no striking part of his subject, and that he never inserts a tittle that does not belong to it. Oh ! how unlike some describers that I have met with, of modern days, who smother you with words, words, words, and then think that they have copied nature ; when all the while nature was an object either not looked at, or not sufficiently : as if a painter, having a beautiful woman to draw, should give you, indeed, something like the outline of her face, but should fill it up with all the colours of the rainbow. . . . Yours, my beloved cousin, with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects,

WM. COWPER.

CLVI

*To Lady Hesketh.*

*Jan. 16, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I have sent, as I hope you have heard by this time, a specimen to my good friend the General. To tell

you the truth, I begin to be ashamed of myself that I had opposed him in the only two measures he recommended, and then assured him that I should be glad of his advice at all times. Having put myself under a course of strict self-examination upon this subject, I found at last that all the reluctance I had felt against a compliance with his wishes, proceeded from a principle of shame-facedness at bottom, that had insensibly influenced my reasonings, and determined me against the counsel of a man whom I knew to be wiser than myself. Wonderful as it may seem, my cousin, yet it is equally true, that although I certainly did translate the *Iliad* with a design to publish it when I had done, and although I have twice issued from the press already, yet I do tremble at the thought, and so tremble at it that I could not bear to send out a specimen, because, by doing so, I should appear in public a good deal sooner than I had purposed. Thus have I developed my whole heart to you, and if you should think it at all expedient, have not the least objection to your communicating to the General this interpretation of the matter. The specimen has suffered a little through my too great zeal of amendment; in one instance, at least, it will be necessary to restore the original reading. And by the way I will observe that a scrupulous nicety is a dangerous thing. It often betrays a writer into a worse mistake than it corrects, sometimes makes a blemish where before there was none, and is almost always fatal to the spirit of the performance.



You do not ask me, my dear, for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*, and by *the perpetual interruptions* that I mentioned. Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself, for that very cause I will tell you. A wish so suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then that in the year 73 the same scene that was acted at St. Alban's, opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy, and ordained to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childish imbecility. I did not indeed lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer even to a difficult question, but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehension of things and persons that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all; was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life:—a caution for which there was the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's

aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had ; she performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion ; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask,—your affection for me will, I know, make you wish to do so,—Is it removed ? I reply, in great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and I think less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better however as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of birdcages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing, but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a

little history in shorthand ; I know that it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote the Task*, (for it occupied me about a year,) *I was very often most supremely unhappy*, and am under God indebted in good part to that work for not having been much worse. You did not know what a clever fellow I am, and how I can turn my hand to any thing.

I perceive that this time I shall make you pay double postage, and there is no help for it. Unless I write myself out now, I shall forget half of what I have to say. Now therefore for the interruptions at which I hinted.—There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney ; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls above-said, by which means we considerably

shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all, a measure the rather expedient, because in winter the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my particular business, (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began *The Task*,—for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten, and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy: long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill-health, and before I quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add therefore, that

having paid my morning visit, I walked ; returning from my walk, I dressed ; we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night.

My cousin, I thank you for giving me a copy of the General's note, of which I and my publication were so much the subject. I learned from it better than I could have learned the same thing from any other document, the kindness of his purposes towards me, and how much I may depend on his assistance. I am vexed, and have been these three days, that I thwarted him in the affair of a specimen ; but as I told you, I have still my gloomy hours, which had their share, together with the more powerful cause assigned above, in determining my behaviour. But I have given the best proof possible of my repentance, and was indeed in such haste to evince it, that I sent my despatches to Newport, on purpose to catch the by-post. How much I love you for the generosity of that offer which made the General observe that your money seemed to burn in your pocket, I cannot readily, nor indeed at all, express. Neither is Mrs. Unwin in the least behind me in her sense of it. We may well admire and love you, for we have not met with many such occurrences, or even heard of many such, since we first entered a world where friendship is in every mouth, but finds only here and there a heart that has room for it.

I know well, my cousin, how formidable a creature you are when you become once outrageous. No sprat in a storm is half so terrible. But it is all in vain. You are at a distance, so we snap our fingers at you.



Not that we have any more fowls at present. No, no ; you may make yourself easy upon that subject. The coop is empty, and at this time of year cannot be replenished. But the spring will soon begin to advance. There are such things as eggs in the world, which eggs will, by incubation, be transformed, some of them into chickens, and others of them into ducklings. So muster up all your patience, for as sure as you live, if we live also, we shall put it to the trial. But seriously, you must not deny us one of the greatest pleasures we can have, which is, to give you now and then a little tiny proof how much we value you. We cannot sit with our hands before us, and be contented with only saying that we love Lady Hesketh.

The little item that you inserted in your cover, concerning a review of a certain author's work, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, excited Mrs. Unwin's curiosity to see it in a moment. In vain did I expostulate with her on the vanity of all things here below, especially of human praise, telling her what perhaps indeed she had heard before, but what on such an occasion I thought it not amiss to remind her of, that at the best it is but as the idle wind that whistles as it passes by, and that a little attention to the dictates of reason would presently give her the victory over all the curiosity that she felt so troublesome. For a short time, indeed, I prevailed, but the next day the fit returned upon her with more violence than before. She would see it,—she was resolved that she would see it that moment. You must know, my dear, that

a watchmaker lives within two or three doors of us, who takes in the said Magazine for a gentleman at some distance, and as it happened it had not been sent to its proper owner. Accordingly the messenger that the lady dispatched, returned with it, and she was gratified. As to myself, I read the article indeed, and read it to her ; but I do not concern myself much you may suppose about such matters, and shall only make two or three cursory remarks, and so conclude. In the first place therefore, I observe that it is enough to craze a poor poet to see his verses so miserably misprinted, and which is worse if possible, his very praises in a manner annihilated, by a jumble of the lines out of their places, so that in two instances, the end of the period takes the lead of the beginning of it. The said poet has still the more reason to be crazed, because the said Magazine is in general singularly correct. But at Christmas, no doubt your printer will get drunk as well as another man. It is astonishing to me that they know so exactly how much I translated of Voltaire. My recollection refreshed by them tells me that they are right in the number of the books that they affirm to have been translated by me, but till they brought the fact again to my mind, I myself had forgotten that part of the business entirely. My brother had twenty guineas for eight books of English *Henriade*, and I furnished him with four of them. They are not equally accurate in the affair of the Tame Mouse. That I kept one is certain, and that I kept it as they say, in my bureau,—but not in the Temple.

It was while I was at Westminster. I kept it till it produced six young ones, and my transports when I first discovered them cannot easily be conceived,—any more than my mortification, when going again to visit my little family, I found that mouse herself had eaten them ! I turned her loose, in indignation, and vowed never to keep a mouse again. Who the writer of this article can be, I am not able to imagine, nor where he had his information of these particulars. But they know all the world and everything that belongs to it. The mistake that has occasioned the mention of Unwin's name in the margin would be ludicrous if it were not, inadvertently indeed, and innocently on their part, profane. I should have thought it impossible that when I spoke of One who had been wounded in the hands and in the side, any reader in a Christian land could have been for a moment at a loss for the person intended.

Adieu, my dear cousin ; I intended that one of these should have served as a case for the other, but before I was aware of it, I filled both sheets completely. However, as your money burns in your pocket, there is no harm done. I shall not add a syllable more, except that I am and, while I breathe, ever shall be most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

Yes ; one syllable more. Having just finished the *Iliad*, I was determined to have a deal of talk with you.

## CLVII

*To Lady Hesketh.*OLNEY, *Feb.* 9, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, every thing that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and

his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made: but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and



there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him, whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be any thing better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.—Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin,

W. C.

#### CLVIII

*To Lady Hesketh.*

OLNEY, *Feb. 11, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

It must be, I suppose, a fortnight or thereabout since I wrote last, I feel myself so alert and so ready to write again. Be that as it may, here I come. We talk of nobody but you. What we will do with you when we get you, where you shall walk, where you shall sleep; in short, every thing that bears the remotest relation to your well-being at Olney, occupies all our talking time,—which is all that I do not spend at Troy.

I have every reason for writing to you as often as I can, but I have a particular reason for doing it now. I want to tell you that by the Diligence on Wednesday

next, I mean to send you a quire of my Homer for Maty's perusal. It will contain the first book, and as much of the second as brings us to the catalogue of the ships, and is every morsel of the revised copy that I have transcribed. My dearest cousin, read it yourself, let the General read it; do what you please with it, so that it reach Johnson in due time. But let Maty be the only *critic* that has anything to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity, that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable, except by the author, whose ill fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance had nothing to do in all this distress that

I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm, that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only, thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand that my constitution would not bear it. I shall send up this second specimen in a box that I have had made on purpose ; and when Maty has done with the copy, and you have done with it yourself, then you must return it in said box to my translatorship. Though Johnson's friend has teased me sadly, I verily believe that I shall have no more such cause to complain of him. We now understand one another, and I firmly believe that I might have gone the world through, before I had found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original.

A letter to Mr. Urban in the last *Gentleman's Magazine*, of which I's book is the subject, pleases me more than anything I have seen in the way of eulogium yet. I have no guess of the author.

I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has, no doubt, forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs. C———e, and her sister, in King Street, Bloomsbury, and there was the promise made. I said—"Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are." He smiled, and

replied, "I surely will."—"These ladies," said I, "are witnesses." He still smiled, and said—"Let them be so, for I will certainly do it." But alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof; and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.—Adieu, whom I love entirely,

W. C.

END OF VOL. I







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